Mrs. [illegible]
Ketchum, Ida 7/1/50

TROUBLED SPRING

Troubled Spring

JOHN BRICK

When he reached the crest
Of the Long Hill, he paused and felt the wind
Blow on his face, and leaned upon his stick,
Gazing at troubled Spring.

He carried still
Wounds of a sort, some healed into the scars
And some that hardly would be healed awhile,
Being in stuff few surgeries can reach,
But he was well enough, although the wind
Felt colder than it had in other Springs.

STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT

Farrar, Straus and Company New York

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For Mary

Note to Reader

Anachronisms in this novel are for the most part deliberate. The student of Hudson Valley history may note that there was no railroad along the west shore from Hoboken to Albany as early as 1865. Those familiar with the chronicles of Andersonville may recall that only six men were hanged there on July 11, 1864.

However, since all characters, other than those historically identified, are fictitious, and since there is no Hudson Valley city called Highland Landing (nor any Highland County in the State of New York), the author hopes that his reader will echo Huckleberry Finn's remark about Mr. Mark Twain: "There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth."

J.B.

1.

The train began to move again, the wheels clicking on the rails, remote, muffled, cushioned by the snow, until the sound was swept away to the north along the river, and the lights on the rear of the train vanished through the swirling curtain of the storm.

The station platform was deserted but for the shadowed blur of motion down by the baggage room, where a man crouched over a mailsack and tossed it to his shoulder and then hunched with his burden toward the prismatic patch of light in the open doorway.

A lantern flickered and flared beside the gate to the street, the reflection of its flame on the great brass handle of the gate seeming to form another tiny light, which was obscured and lost when the wind whipped sheets of snow down from the roof of the station.

I stood there on the wide planking of the platform near the tracks for a minute or two, feeling the fine dry snow striking a myriad gentle taps on my face, blinking my eyes as I felt it clinging to my lashes, and listening to the many voices of the wind as it carried the storm down from the mountains. Far away and alien to the silence which closed the night around me, I could hear the whistle of the train blowing for the crossroads at Peterkin's brickyard north of the town.

I looked up at the lights of the town burning sullenly yellow through the shifting screen of snow. I wanted to do something to announce my return; I wanted to shout, or laugh, or just hold out my arms as if the town could draw

me in. I even wanted to fall prone in the snow and brush it away from the planks of the platform and kiss them.

Instead, I knelt, favoring my stiff leg, and scooped up a handful of snow. I padded it into a snowball—it was dry, powdery, and it didn't pack well. I felt the coldness of it through the thin cotton gloves they had given me, and I wondered if the time would ever come again when I could see the first flurries of a snowstorm without recalling the misery and the loneliness of the past four winters.

As I walked through the gate to the street, I tossed the snowball at the sign nailed to the wall of the station. I read the sign.

HIGHLAND LANDING, N.Y. ELEVATION—465 FEET

Who cares how high it is, I asked myself. Just so I can say it's home. That's all that matters. It's been a long time.

And suddenly I stopped at the gate, and I said the name over again aloud, in that kind of half-whisper I had adopted during the past year, a half-whisper which for almost twelve months had joined thousands of others exactly like it through all the long nights to give the effect of a vast pit of hissing, slithering snakes.

I said the name: "High-*land Land*-ing," realizing that it wasn't correct that way, that I was giving the words a harsh incorrect emphasis, and I could not remember the right way to say it. It was like one of those times when you're trying to write a simple word you've used all your life, and can't spell it correctly.

You can't forget, I told myself. Not a name that has been part of you since you were born, that has been with you all the days and nights since you left it.

So I went through the gate, and the small square station with its high gables and its slate roof faded into the falling snow, and as I walked along the dark street between the rows of warehouses, limping and slipping every now and

then on the snow-covered cobblestones, I said the name of the town again and again, and still I couldn't get it quite right.

Then, as I passed one of the dark buildings just beyond the station, a door creaked open and light from a lantern flooded the loading platform below the door. I stopped and looked up into the glare. It was probably a night watchman.

"Hello," I called. "What's the name of this town?"

There was a moment's silence, and the lantern lifted high so that its bearer might see beyond its glare. I saw his face then, moving from side to side—thin, aged, fearful. I waited while he peered suspiciously at me.

He'll slam the door, I thought. I remember that much, anyway. They never speak to strangers—not to strangers who get off the train on a dark stormy night and don't even know where they are.

But he didn't slam the door. He answered me, pronouncing the words just the way everyone who had ever lived in Highland Landing had pronounced them ever since my great-great-great-grandfather had given the town its name in 1712. This old watchman said them now quickly and slurred a little, like this: "Highlin' Landin'."

I repeated them after him, and then said them again, laughing at the ease with which I said them now. "Thanks," I told the old man. "Thank you very much."

Probably he thought I was quite mad. At any rate, the door swung to and latched with a loud click. I walked away down the street, saying the name of the town over and over with much satisfaction.

I'm home, I told myself. I'm home at last.

The ice on the river beyond the warehouses and the railroad tracks was shifting, and every few seconds it would crack and send a dull boom reverberating through the storm, and I remembered how Sherman's guns had sounded

in the distance when he was smashing at Macon on the march through Georgia—we could hear them sometimes quite clearly and then we cheered and laughed and wept. But of course they had moved us then, to keep ahead of him, not wanting him to have the small victory of freeing a few thousand helpless, sick, ragged prisoners whom they couldn't even feed, let alone drag after them as they fled. But we had heard the guns and we knew that Sherman was coming. Now I heard that sound again in a land of peace, the booming of distant artillery from the shifting ice on the Hudson River.

I hurried my steps along Front Street. It was a dreary dark place at night with its deserted warehouses, and now they loomed strangely, forbiddingly, out of the swirling snow. At First Street, I left the cobblestones and climbed to the board walk that fronted the row of shabby two- and three-story dwellings on this block. I remembered one house on the corner of Second Street and Front. There had been tales about it even when I was a boy. The window of the door was curtained now with red cloth, and in the hall a lamp burned dimly, throwing a patch of red on the snow. As I passed, a man's voice lifted in a raucous chant of an obscene ditty I had heard sung in a hundred bivouacs, to the tune of "The Girl I Left Behind Me":

Oh, she jumped in bed and she covered up her head,
And she said I couldn't find her.
But she knew damn well that she lied like hell,
'Cause I jumped right in behind her.

The shrillness of a drunken woman's laughter followed the verse, and another man cursed his approval and shouted for more.

The army is beginning to come home, I thought, and I recalled the words which someone had invariably, mo-

notonously contributed to any talk of home: "Well, I'll tell you, boys—when I get home the second thing I'm going to do is take my boots off!" And then another would pick it up and carry it along: "Last letter I wrote, I told her to paint the bedroom ceiling her favorite color, 'cause she ain't going to be looking at the floor for a long time."

Home, I thought. After four years. In a month, two months more, every railroad in the country will be loaded with them: leaning out the windows to search for familiar landmarks, waving to the girls on the streets of the towns, hanging out the signs—"Here Comes Your Hero, Ma" and "All Aboard for God's Country" and "We Did It—Grant and Sherman and Me," and drinking and singing and shouting. One thing will be different, I thought. There won't be any bands playing the way they did in '61, nor any parades. Just get off the train and walk through the town to your home, the way I'm doing. Maybe that's the best way; they must all be pretty sick of the war, the ones who didn't have to fight it. They'll see the trains loaded down with soldiers, and they'll be glad to see it, but they won't cheer themselves hoarse anymore. Just wave and watch the trains go by. Vermont, New York, Ohio, Iowa—all the railroads. Except down South. They'll have to walk home. They haven't any rails left nor cars to roll on them.

I turned up Second Street hill from the tracks. Crossing Hudson Street, all its stores and offices dark now, I continued up the hill. I stopped before Number 26, looking up at the windows of the first-floor offices. For as long as I could remember that gold leaf in block letters had read "Isaac C. Bellnap, Attorney-at-Law." And I recalled how he used to pause on the sidewalk, looking up at the words, and say to me, "Sam, one day we'll have to change that. It will be 'Bellnap and Bellnap, Attorneys-at-Law.' How about it?"

I would say, "Sure, Father, you and I."

But father was dead now, and the letters on the windows formed another name, one I did not recognize.

I hoped that we still owned the building; I would like to restore the name to those windows. My brother David was only sixteen—some day it might be "Bellnap and Bellnap" after all.

So I hoped that Robert hadn't sold it since father died. There was no reason to assume that he had; my elder brother had been a good businessman ever since childhood. I remembered how he had always managed to accumulate things—whatever we might be collecting, whether it be arrowheads dug out of the banks of Murderer's Creek, or birds' eggs, or marbles, Robert had traded so well that he always had the most and the best. He had loved to deal in those treasured commodities of our boyhood. I had never had the patience to save up so many of this and swap them for so many of that, and so on. Robert, however, had been the champion trader at Clinton Academy. One day he started to school with an old flintlock pistol I had found somewhere. I doubt that he lied about it—just stretched the truth. Perhaps a tap or two with his finger on the broken lock or the rusty barrel and a whispered: "Remember how Aaron Burr killed Alexander Hamilton?" and then another tap on the pistol, combined with an antiquarian's knowing air. Anyway, home he came in the evening, riding proudly on an ancient pony which had always served to transport one of the farm boys who went to school with us. Of course, mother made him take it back immediately; father had laughed until he cried, gasping amid the laughter: "Let the young swindler keep it! Aaron Burr! Alexander Hamilton! I'll pay for the pony. He deserves it!"

Remembering my brother's business ability, I imagined that we still owned 26 Second Street. It was one of the choicest office sites in town, and Robert knew the value of a good investment.

I was tempted to climb the steps and look into the offices to see if the present tenant was using father's rolltop desk and swivel chair and if father's books were still there—that well-remembered assortment of leather-bound law books shelved helter-skelter with Shakespeare, Thomas Paine, Dean Swift, Laurence Sterne, *et al.* But I didn't really want to look; I supposed most lawyers would consider father's furniture old-fashioned and *Tristram Shandy* a book which no Highland Landing client could approve. There would be time in the days ahead to come down here, when I could stand in the doorway and remember my father with his feet on the desk and a book on his knees, or perhaps, with an astonished client ready to break for the door, he would be striding the length of the room, tugging his beard, and declaiming his favorite piece of Shakespeare, from *King Henry VI:*

> *Between two hawks, which flies the higher pitch;*
> *Between two dogs, which hath the deeper mouth;*
> *Between two blades, which bears the better temper;*
> *Between two horses, which doth bear him best;*
> *Between two girls, which hath the merriest eye;*
> *I have perhaps, some shallow spirit of judgment;*
> *But in these nice sharp quillets of the law,*
> *Good faith, I am no wiser than a daw.*

I never knew the Earl of Suffolk's modest disavowal of legal knowledge to lose father a client, but it made a few of them wonder. And it was true, in a sense. Certainly, he knew the law as well as any of his fellows in Highland Landing, and much more than myself, but it was really an avocation with him. Hawks, dogs, blades, horses—they *were* his life; he would sooner take me and Davey and sometimes Robert up into the Catskills for a week than win a case before the Supreme Court. And for the rest—"Be-

tween two girls, which hath the merriest eye"—all I need say for his judgment is that he married my mother.

Now I turned away from the building, set my forage cap more firmly on my head, pulled the collar of my caped overcoat up around my ears and walked into the storm again.

The fall of fine dry snow was not unusual for March here in the middle Hudson Valley. We sometimes had long winters, when belated storms would climb the Catskills—pushed by the northerly winds—and then sweep down the slopes and across the plateau to the towns along the river. Spring was often long in coming. I remembered how Doctor Byrnes had used to snort: "Hudson Valley! Hah! Sinus Valley, they should call it!"

At the top of the hill, I turned right and walked along Grand Street. Now I began to pass people hurrying on the sidewalk under the bare maple trees; on the hill and down by the tracks there had been no one. As these people went by, I wanted to put out my arm and halt them and say: "Look, I'm home! Remember me? Sam Bellnap. You remember." But of course I did not; they passed rapidly with no more than a moment's glance at me. Limping soldiers had long ceased to be a rarity.

Up here, the light from the windows of homes poured out through the swirling flakes upon the drifted snow, gilding its surface and turning the thin barren bushes and shrubs into shining black webbing edged with dark gold. I knew the people who lived here: Mayor Hasbrouck; Winthrop Colden, the banker; Sheriff Boudrye; Reverend Imbrie, whose son Taylor I had seen killed in Farnsworth's charge at Gettysburg.

The snow silenced the night but for the occasional rise and fall of the whining wind and the creaking of a bough here and there overhead. Then, as I walked by the graceful brick expanse of the old Huguenot Hotel, its lighted win-

dows casting warm yellow shafts into the storm, I heard a kind of music which seemed to come from somewhere along the next block. The storm distorted the sound; it was a jumble of euphonic murmurings, muffled, familiar, yet unremembered. It puzzled me. I tried to recall the buildings just ahead. The courthouse, the Cameron funeral home, big and gloomy—certainly that wasn't funereal music. It sounded like a choir. Then just ahead I saw the dark spire of a church jutting into the black sky, and I knew that they were practicing next Sunday's hymns at St. George's.

And instantly the memory of Martha, never far away during that journey now behind me, returned, and I could see her there, standing in the front row with her slanted, startlingly gray eyes fixed on Mr. Talbot, the choir-master, and I could see her wide mouth, not gaping in the effort of singing like those around her, but half-opened as if her husky voice needed no channel, but would make its own way, rich and clear, from her throat. She would have her dark hair combed severely back and tied with a wide ribbon on the nape of her neck, although the natural wave of her hair would not be so hidden, and she would be wearing one of those blue or black or brown dresses she wore so often, as if someone had once told her that a schoolteacher must never be beautiful. But I knew that she would also be wearing a belt or sash of some vivid color, because I had once demanded that she should, to accentuate the slim firm body and the flashing eyes. I remembered how she had looked at me when I told her that was why I wanted her to wear the bright color—looked at me with eyes that glinted amusement, while her voice was soft and solemn in promise that she would. And she always had.

I thought of that as I approached the church. And I thought of poor Mr. Talbot; Martha had once told me how he stammered and blushed every time she spoke to him, how he kept his eyes on her whenever he thought no one

was watching. I could understand that; I wondered if he felt the way I had sometimes when I'd heard her voice—if he had wanted to seize her shoulders and stand close to her and close his eyes and listen to that voice forever. He wouldn't dare. A little chipmunk of a man, Mr. Talbot was, with his jaws working incessantly and his hands pawing the air before his face as he led the choir. And Martha could upset him with a word. Every time she approached him, he probably ducked and scampered like a chipmunk on a stonewall.

The singing grew in volume now. I imagined how I would hold her for a long time, feeling the warm pulsing pressure of her body against me, and hearing her tell me in soft whispers how long it had been, her lips moving across my cheek and touching my mouth as she said the words.

I reached the grilled gate of the churchyard; it was open, and I turned in for a few steps. Then I hesitated and stopped, looking at the stained glass, the colors faint in the dim light within, and at the shadowed stone bulk of the building, laced with thin white lines where the snow had settled on the bare tendrils of clinging ivy.

No, not in a church, I told myself. Not the way this will be. Anywhere but a church. She would be restrained, distant, afraid to hear all those women in the choir twittering like a flock of blackbirds. I knew what they'd be saying: "Look at that! No shame at all! And she's Judge Crist's daughter!"

Wait until tomorrow, I thought. Then we can talk for a long time, and later I can hold her and I can bruise her lips with mine in the darkness and I can touch her beauty with my fingers and then I'll know that four years are gone forever and everything is the same as it was the night before I went away.

But it had been too long. I'd been home only once in those four years—for two days after Gettysburg, in July of

1863. That was the summer when my father's death was fast approaching; there had been little time for Martha in that brief visit. Now, however, there was all the rest of my life. I would wait until tomorrow.

So I turned again, reluctantly, and I walked through the gate and along the street once more, and the singing faded into a far-off murmur and was gone, leaving only the drifting hiss of the snow and now the wind rising.

Three blocks more and I came to the black spears of a high iron fence, and I slowed and looked at the white-quilted ground within, patchworked in close regularity by the smooth dark slabs of headstones, the cold inanimate outlines of angels, and here and there the needlepoint of an obelisk piercing the blackness above. Here again I turned in, unfastening the chained gate and shuffling along a roadway until I stopped at a large plot of graves set off from the rest by an ornate chained fence. I awkwardly stepped over the chains and stood among the graves within. I needed no light to read the names and dates on the stones.

I remembered the earliest, the granite marker which was chipped, weatherworn, with some words obliterated:

HERE LIE THE MORTAL REMAINS OF JACOB BELLNAP
LATE JUSTICE OF THE ROYAL
COLONY OF NEW YORK
LONG AND FAITHFUL SERVANT OF HIS KING
FRIEND AND COUNSELLOR TO HIS NEIGHBOUR
WHO ENTERED THIS LIFE
MAY 7 1685
AND DEPARTED FROM IT
OCTOBER 21 1760

MAY HE REST IN PEACE FOREVER

In that grave was the founder of Highland Landing—adventurer, soldier, landowner, patriarch—the first of the Bellnaps in the New World.

I picked out the newest stone, a small gray piece of marble on which the letters stood forth bleakly, set immediately beside another slightly more stained from exposure. I had visited the latter many times. It was my mother's. The new stone was the one I had come into the cemetery to see.

I knelt on my good knee in the yielding snow and read the few words on it:

ISAAC C. BELLNAP
BORN DECEMBER 15, 1804
DIED APRIL 29, 1864
REQUIESCAT

I stayed there for a moment in the snow, and my lips moved. It was some time before I knew that all I had said was, "Hello, Father. Here I am. I came home at last." Then I turned and left the cemetery.

It was only a short way now, another quarter-mile to the edge of town and our house. One more quarter-mile's march in this uniform. The rest of them were still marching, victoriously now, far to the south—chasing the remnants of a beaten, disintegrating army—march and attack, attack and march. The victory we had so confidently expected in 1861 could no longer elude them now.

And for me the end of four years was just up the road. The house would be there looming big and comfortable through the storm, with the lights shining beyond the skeletons of the trees.

Although Davey and Robert would be there, it would be a lonely house for a while. Father dead almost a year—and how long had it been since my mother died? Six years. It seemed scarcely that long since the day the three of us, Davey and Robert and myself, had filed into the large bedroom where she lay dying. It was early in September—from the bedroom window on the south could be seen a fire in the Highlands, a huge patch of black against the

green and brown of the mountainside, with a perimeter of grayish smoke curling into the pale blue sky. Down in the bay, a large clumsy vessel was being towed into a mooring, while a cannon boomed at intervals from the ferry wharf. I recall thinking that ordinarily Robert would have been down there to board her. She was the *Robert Bellnap*, named for my grandfather, who had been one of the founders of the Highland Landing Whaling Company. In that year, 1859, the whaling industry was all but finished for Hudson River ports. Only the *Robert Bellnap* and three or four other vessels out of Poughkeepsie and the city of Hudson were still bringing oil home after three-year voyages in the remote waters of the world.

On another day my brother Robert would have been down there to greet the ship's master, but instead he was with us in my mother's room, watching my father kneeling beside the bed with his head in his folded arms, while my mother spoke to us. She had to call me away from the window. I didn't think I could look at my father's naked grief nor at the lines of pain in my mother's thin proud face.

Her voice was calm and patient, very weak, although I could hear the words clearly: "I want you all to listen to me now, boys. There's only a little time to talk. What is that booming noise?"

"They're saluting the *Robert Bellnap*, Mother," I answered softly. "She came upriver this morning."

"A good cargo, Robert?"

"I don't know, Mother. I haven't been down yet. She's just docking now."

"Sell your shares in the whaling company, dear," she said to father. "Robert has told you that for years now. It's finished."

Father made an inaudible reply, still not lifting his head.

"You attend to it, Robert," she said with a faint smile. "Don't let sentiment interfere."

"I will," Robert promised.

"Now—my three fine sons. You know that I'm going to leave you now. Do you know that, Davey?"

David sobbed and buried his head in my jacket. I put my arm around his thin shoulders.

"Come closer to me," my mother said. "I can't talk very loudly. Rise up, my dear, and stand with the boys," she told father. "I want to see you all together."

He rose awkwardly, his face turned away from us, and yet when he finally straightened and stood beside us, he managed to smile. Robert and I each put an arm around him.

"Now, listen," mother said. "I have no property to dispose of; if I had, it would of course go to you, Isaac. Rather, I have some advice to give you. You, Isaac, and Samuel, and even Davey, young as you are, will do well to heed what I am saying. I am going to leave the three of you in Robert's care. On him will be the responsibility for this family. He is the only one of you who knows or cares how money is gained, how business is transacted, how this family gained the position it holds in this town. You three—horses, and hunting, and fishing, and books! The money and the position are not ends in themselves, of course. You don't need them to be happy. The three of you would be happy in a shack on Esopus Creek, as long as the fish were biting. But you have the money and the things it can mean—let Robert preserve them for you!"

Father started to protest, but, weakly and yet imperatively, she lifted her hand from the blanket.

"You know I'm right, Isaac. I love all of you, and I know you all better than you know yourselves. For twenty-five years, Isaac Bellnap, I've taken care of you! If I had not put a curb on your generosity and advised you in your business affairs after your father died, we all might be out on the poor farm. And I'm telling you all now to allow Robert to take my place. Isaac, you're a lawyer—and Sam,

you'll be one in another year—and little Davey, you say you're going to be whatever Sam is. That's fine. And yet, why all this interest in practicing law? Simply because you know you really don't have to do anything about it. Just having a profession is enough. It leaves all your time free either to gallivant around the countryside or to stick your nose in a dusty book or to fiddle with politics. I'm not condemning these things—they are all important to you and I wouldn't have you any other way. But not one of you has enough responsibility to come in out of the rain! Robert has, and I'm entrusting you all to him."

I was the one who began the protest this time: "But, Mother, isn't Father the most respected, most sought-after lawyer—"

"Exactly! And why has he always managed to take you roaming the Catskills or the Shawangunks or sailing the Hudson for days and days at a time? Because there was work to be done at home, some of it disagreeable, and he, poor man, always became too distressed at other people's troubles. So he ducked out and went fishing!"

Her gentle smile belied the harsh words, and even father, despite his sorrow, chuckled and nodded to me: "She's right, Sam. Always has been right."

"Now I'm tired," mother announced. "I've talked too much. Robert, will you take care of these three dunderheads? I have hopes for Davey; he's young enough to listen to you. Keep the other two out of trouble."

"I will, Mother," Robert said. His voice was solemn and sad, its tone reluctant. He knew the serious intent of her bantering words, and it is probable that he had some presentiment of the strained years ahead.

We each kissed her pale cheek and left the room together. It was not many hours later that we returned sadly to be with her once more for a few minutes before she died.

Now I remembered that day as I walked up the street

toward that house again. I shifted my coat up higher on my shoulders and bent into the thrust of the snow.

Robert has done his job well, I thought. He has managed the house and the business affairs with good judgment. I suppose he's done well since I've been gone.

I recalled that he had not permitted father and myself to escape responsibility entirely. I freely admit that we probably would have done so had he allowed it.

Now, however, his work was finished. I had reached maturity in four years of dirt, disease, and death. During that time when so many men had been shattered by wounds or sickness, from first Bull Run to these last desperate engagements in March of 1865, I had survived. It wasn't all luck. Robert would find that the boy who went to war had returned a man.

It was only a hundred yards or so now. Out here on the outskirts of Highland Landing, the houses were bigger, farther apart, and set well back from the street. I knew that the dip in the road hid our place for a few more steps, but I peered eagerly into the night.

Behind me in the road came the quick cushioned thudding of a horse's hooves on the snow and the crunch of steel-tired carriage wheels. The vehicle drew alongside and I heard a woman's voice say: "Stop a moment, Joseph."

And then her voice called: "Can we give you a ride, soldier?"

"No thanks," I answered, bowing slightly. "I'm not going far."

The carriage passed on.

That was nice of her, I thought. Just stop like that and offer a soldier a ride. I'm going to force myself to learn about casual friendliness all over again, I thought. The last voice I heard from a passing carriage was when they moved us from Andersonville to keep ahead of Sherman. Then it was, "Out of my way, Yankee bastard!" And pretty soon,

the next time they decided Sherman was getting too close, there weren't any more passing carriages or horses to pull them, and then they were walking right along with us bastards, those of them who couldn't run fast enough to keep ahead of the sound of the guns.

Now I had passed the last house before ours, and I could see a light ahead, shining from our library windows, faint and flickering like a firefly as the branches of the intervening trees swayed before it. Soon there was the tall square blackness of the building and the long upward thrust of its "Hudson River Gothic" architecture as conceived by Andrew Jackson Downing, the most renowned architect of his time. And above the building was the rounded outline of the cupola where father had kept his telescopes. That cupola had been the subject of hours of argument between father and Mr. Downing.

"I'll have nothing to do with a building which has a horror like that on top of it. It violates every aesthetic principle of architecture!" Mr. Downing would exclaim, his handsome face showing his deep indignation while his voice lost its famous quality of cultured ease. Mother had told us how father had listened with mock gravity to Mr. Downing's somewhat pompous protests.

"And I'll not live above the most beautiful river in the world and not be able to see it from my home," father would answer.

Then mother would draw my father aside and point out that you simply could not build a house in the Hudson Valley unless Downing designed it, and wouldn't he please let Mr. Downing have his own way, and father would say in a perfectly audible voice that he'd be damned if he would, and if a man was going to live in a house he had a right to build it as he pleased.

Well, father had his cupola, and odd enough it looked perched atop that great dark building. I am sure, however,

that whenever Mr. Downing sailed past Highland Landing he never nodded toward the Bellnap place high on the plateau above the river and said: "That's one of mine."

It was a big house—the only lie I had ever heard Father tell was one for which he can be forgiven; while he showed visitors around, never failing to stress the Downing architecture but claiming the cupola as his own, he airily informed them that he never knew just how many rooms there were. He said he always lost count after fifteen. I think his pride in the size of the house stemmed from his boyhood days, when he had lived in the first home of the Bellnaps in Highland Landing, a high-roofed, low-ceilinged Dutch house with small rooms and many tiny windows. That sturdy building had been the result of some clever trading in 1710 between Jacob Bellnap and the down-river Dutch. He had the land grant and they wanted land. The house was the result. Our present home was built on the site of the original one, which had burned in 1820. The land was part of the original grant by Queen Anne.

The house was far back from the road, and all the grounds were surrounded by closely planted barberry hedges. Along the drive leading to the front verandah were two lines of trees—they were elms, their long slender limbs naked now in the bleak winter, standing high and forlorn and thin; in summer they were beautiful trees, thick with rough-veined leaves interlaced to form a dull green arch under which the drive was shaded and cool.

As I opened the gate and entered the walk, I looked up at the elms and hoped that Robert had cared for them. I knew that during father's long illness he would have wanted to look out and see his trees well and strong.

Passing up the walk to the porch, I hesitated on the first step. I tried to frame in my mind a greeting for Robert—I needed none for Davey.

I pictured Robert there in the library—tall and slender

and dark like father and myself. And handsome as well. I thought we looked very much alike, although at balls and parties before the war, Highland Landing's young women had always made it a point to mention to me how handsome they thought my brother was—and yet I'd never heard anyone say that about me. Probably one of Robert's most attractive features was his air of quiet competence and authority.

Now I imagined that there would have to be some special way of speaking the first few words between us—to let him know how happy I was to be home again and at the same time to let him see how different a man I was from the brother he had expected. I'd seen him only once since 1861. I wondered how much he had changed. I knew how much I had.

Then I stepped quickly up to the doorway, which was shrouded in thicker darkness than that of the night beyond. Without any need to look for the bell pull, or even to pause and call its position from memory, I reached for it and gave it a firm tug. The bell tinkled softly away back in the kitchen.

From the library came the sound of deliberate footsteps approaching across the carpet of the hall. I could imagine the shoes leaving imprints in the nap of the carpet. They would be fashionable shoes on a slim foot, but they would easily be distinguished by their sturdiness, their lasting quality.

"That's Robert," I whispered.

The door swung open, creaking as if it not only suffered from lack of oil, but was tired of protesting. Light from an oil lamp fell on my face. The first thing I noticed beyond the lamp's flare was that he had grown a moustache. Under the dark full brows which dipped and met at the bridge of his nose, it gave a reassuring fullness to his lean-jawed face.

I spoke first.

"Well, Robert. I'm home."

"Sam!"

I suppressed without reason a desire to put my arms around him and give him a brotherly bear hug. Instead, I put out my hand with a grin. From the stairs beyond the hallway, I heard a young voice calling eagerly: "Who is it, Robert? Is it Sam? Is that you, Sam?"

"It's good to see you, Robert," I said softly.

"Sam, come in out of the cold! Ah, brother, you're home at last!"

2.

The fire burned uneasily, a shifting heap of red imbedded in the great black space of the fireplace. Now and then, as the coals shivered and settled, the flames jumped eagerly for a time, as if they anticipated more fuel, and then they cowered again into the glow of the coals.

David sat on a foot bench close to the hearth. His thin bony face was in profile, and I watched the reflection of the fire twisting over it in lights and shadows.

None of us had spoken now for some time. It was so pleasant just to sit there and smile from time to time. A few minutes after my arrival, Robert and Davey had taken me to the kitchen and fed me a few slices of cold lamb and a baked potato left over from their dinner. Robert had added to that a bottle of burgundy from father's cellar, and now I sat in an armchair in the library with a glass of the wine in my hand, alternately admiring its color in the firelight and studying Davey. He made me realize how long I had been gone. He was almost a man.

He sat crouched on the bench with his shoulders sloped forward and his chin cupped in his hands. Every so often he looked at me and smiled and then looked back into the flames. Once his lips moved, and then he shook his head as if what he was about to say wasn't important, whatever it was.

Robert sat in father's old leather-covered armchair, his tall slim body wrapped snugly in a woolen house jacket, although the room was quite warm. The Highland Landing

Weekly Statesman was folded lengthwise across his knees; he had been reading it when I arrived. His fingers were playing with the fold of the paper, creasing and recreasing it. My glance went from Davey to Robert and back to Davey again.

"Has he been behaving himself?"

"Pretty well, Sam," Robert answered. "If he has any major faults, the only one I've noticed is that he spends all his time trying to be just like you. I know that doesn't sound like a compliment to you, but let me tell you the form it takes. Last year he bought himself a drum and a bugle—one way or another he was bound to get into that war."

"Why not?" Davey exclaimed. "They have drummer boys, don't they, Sam?"

"They have a few," I admitted, laughing. "And there were plenty of veteran soldiers no older than you. But you'd never make it, Dave."

"I can shoot almost as well as you can!"

"Shooting isn't everything, boy. You're too skinny."

"Listen to you talk. You're as thin as an alley cat yourself."

"Don't forget where I've been, Davey."

Of course, I was joking about the army rejecting him because he was thin, but the lack of flesh on his slender body worried me. I noted the knuckles standing forth on his fists, and the slim wrists, the flesh of his face drawn tightly across his high cheekbones, and the way his shoulder blades made angular shadows on his back.

I thought of malnutrition first, and then of sickness. I was an expert on both. I had watched the attenuation of the bodies of thousands of men in Confederate prisons for a whole year—my own body was still gaunt, lacking some twenty pounds of its normal weight, although I had crossed to our lines in Florida more than a month before and had

spent the time since fattening myself on the ship which brought us north and, later, in a hospital in Annapolis.

Of course, this change in Davey's physical appearance had nothing to do with food. Robert saw that he had enough to eat. He looked like one of those many prisoners who had been herded in with us from time to time, the recruits captured in their first battle, who had taken one look at the filth in which we lived and had sickened with despair. I had always studied the reasons why men died in Andersonville, so that I might last as long as possible, and I had noticed that this type scarcely lasted a month.

Why should he look like that here, I asked myself. The war hadn't reached this peaceful, abundant country. Of course, father had died less than a year ago, and only a short while before that—as Robert had told me in the letter I had received at Annapolis the week before—they had been informed that I was dead.

Robert seemed to read my thoughts.

"You and Father, Sam. Not much more than a month apart. It hit us hard. That's what has been wrong with him. I was a poor substitute for you and Father, I suppose. And I haven't the time for camping trips and roaming the woods anymore."

"I'm all right," Davey exclaimed. "Just thin, that's all."

Now as I watched him, I reassured myself that I was all he needed. It wouldn't be long before I had him hunting and fishing with me again. May would soon follow this tag end of winter, and we would begin to spend weekends along the trout streams back in the Catskills, the ones that father and I had long ago marked as our own. All Davey needed, I reasoned, was to return to our old ways. I'd have the time to spend with him, and if I didn't have it, I would take it. Law practice, everything else—they would have to wait while I caught up with the four years lost from my life.

Robert returned to his newspaper. I watched him for a

few moments. I didn't think he was actually reading; his eyes remained fixed on one spot in the page, and never have I seen a man handle a paper with so little rustling and crackling of newsprint. He seemed to be worrying some question in his mind.

Finally I reached into the pocket of the new blouse they had given me at the hospital in Annapolis and I brought out two cigars.

"Have one, Robert," I said. "The best cigars the Confederacy had."

"Thank you, Sam. It's been difficult these past couple of years to get good cigars."

"These are free," I said. "I got them from a soldier in Jacksonville just after I came through the lines. He gave me a box—said they'd been run through the blockade from Havana."

Walking to the fireplace, I picked up a coal in the brass firetongs and lit Robert's cigar and then my own.

He settled back in his chair and picked up his paper again. Then he set it aside.

"Sam, so many things have changed in the past year. We'll have to talk about them now."

"Not tonight, Robert," I protested. "If it's business—money—anything like that, let it go until tomorrow. Let's just sit here and smile at each other, the way we've been doing the past half-hour."

"It's not business, Sam." He paused. "You see, I'm married."

I was amazed. For a minute or two I didn't speak. David looked up quickly and stared at me. A little grin, with more of sadness than humor in it, tipped the corners of Robert's mouth.

"You're married! Who? When?"

"Two months now, Sam. Are you surprised?"

"Astounded! I suppose I always have considered you the

invincible bachelor. Somehow you and marriage seem an odd combination."

"It suits me well, Sam. Very well."

"And why haven't I met Mrs. Bellnap?"

"She'll be home shortly, Sam. She's in town for the evening."

"Is she someone I know, Robert?"

"Yes, you know her, Sam. I had better tell you now. I didn't mention it in my letter to you at Annapolis—I didn't quite know how to say it. She wanted to write to you. I thought it best to wait until you came home. You see—"

"Let me guess, Robert," I interposed. "Don't tell me. One thing—blonde or brunette?"

"Don't guess, Sam. You never would." He rose and walked over to the fireplace beside Davey. His face was in profile as he gazed down at the fire. Then he told me. "Martha. She's my wife, Sam."

Often one hears or reads of people who receive bitter news with a show of emotion, or who sink into despair. Sometimes the reaction is simply one of disbelief. I just sat in my chair, watching the smoke curl in fluttering blue spirals from my cigar. The sounds of the room were ringing clear now: the sputter of the flame in the lamp chimney, the gentle hiss of the burning coals, the wind against the window.

All those months, I thought. Day after endless day spent solely to stay alive, to come home to her. And now I find that I should have died. I should have given up with all the thousands who didn't have the reason to survive that I had.

Robert had turned toward me now. His face was touched with anguish; even in my despair, I was sorry for him.

"If there had been any hope that you were alive," he said haltingly, and then paused. "I know that you loved her when you went away, Sam. She told me, even though I knew it. I don't suppose you've changed." His words were

almost a question. He seemed to wait for an answer.

She told him that, I thought. And how much did she keep secret? How many of those moments does he know about, how many of those kisses has she admitted? And he doesn't suppose I've changed. He has taken from me the only woman I'll ever love, and now he hopes I'll smile and congratulate him and tell him that it's all right.

Instantly I thought of the two letters I had sent home from Annapolis after the journey north. I hadn't tried to write from Florida nor on the hospital ship which had brought us back to God's country. But in Annapolis I had written first a long letter to father, not knowing that he was dead. Robert had replied to that. And secondly I had struggled for hours on a letter to Martha, trying to say all the things which had stored inside me since the Johnnies had caught me outside Richmond. Each attempt to tell her of my love and my joy in coming home to her resulted in another crumpled sheet of paper, and now I remembered the brief letter I had finally penned:

My dear Martha:

I am free at last, and I am coming home to you and to Highland Landing. I shall come as quickly as they give me my discharge, so don't write to me here. All my love. Sam.

She must have shown Robert that letter, and therefore he questioned me now, asking almost hopefully whether my love for Martha had changed. Surely they couldn't see in that letter the longing to hold her once again and hear her whisper: "I love you, Sam."

Now I looked steadily at Robert and even smiled, despite the real pain which I felt, despite the ruined picture of future happiness which his words had slashed, for all the world like the remnants of a work of art ripped by a vandal's knife.

"No, Robert," I said evenly. "I don't think I've changed. I still love her, if that's what you mean. But I won't be bitter or angry. No one knew that I was alive. And perhaps it's best this way. I'm not the same Samuel Bellnap who went away four years ago."

"If we had known that you were a prisoner—"

"It's all right! You couldn't have done any more, when the War Department said I was killed."

"She's been worried, Sam. You can understand that. She's afraid you'll hate us both."

"I understand. Don't worry about me, Robert. In Andersonville I learned how important peace and happiness are." I forced myself to rise from my chair and cross to him. Taking his hand, I gripped it and smiled. "Congratulations, brother."

"Thank you, Sam."

There seemed to be nothing more for us to say.

3.

We all sat in silence again. Outside, the wind, now rushing fiercely down from the mountains, shrieked around the corners of the house and whipped the snow against the windows in incessant tappings, as if all the old Dutch dwarfs in the Catskills had been swept by the storm down from their hidden glens and were seeking admittance to our hearth. All through the house there were creakings and snappings of the flooring and the great oaken doors.

I wondered where Martha could be in the storm, and I was tempted to ask, but decided not to speak of her again until Robert did so. Then I thought of choir practice at St. George's, and guessed that she was there. I reasoned that she must be with friends who would see her safely home.

So it's all done, I thought. Finished. And she was afraid I would hate them for it. Why don't I? It's reason enough for hatred.

Despite my apparent calmness, in my mind was a tumbling confusion of questions asked of myself, each resolving to the endless repetition of "Why? Why? Why?" and none receiving any answer. Yet there was no reason to wonder why. The shock of their marriage itself was enough. If I'd been hit in the belly with a bullet from a Spencer carbine at Gettysburg, would I have lain there wondering while I was dying where in hell the Johnny who shot me got the Spencer?

So I'm through here, I thought again. She'll make all the difference in the world now. Even if we didn't have the past to think about, there couldn't be any intimate lovers'

small talk or marital frolicking with two bachelors like Davey and myself standing by. All right, I thought, Davey and I will set up housekeeping for ourselves. We'll let Robert enjoy his marriage.

Settling back more comfortably in my chair, I started to watch Davey, to take my thoughts away from Martha and from the increasingly insistent demand within me that I count off the short months between my reported death and this marriage. Only ten months between March and January. That must have been too long to wait.

Davey sat before the fire, still motionless. A few minutes before we had many things to talk about; now there was nothing.

I turned my eyes to follow the fingers of light which probed into a dark corner of the room for an instant and then leaped away. It was a large room, although the thousands of books covering three of the walls diminished it somewhat. Years before, our house had been one of the first in this part of Highland Landing to be fitted with gaslight, but we had never used anything but oil lamps in the library. Their light was more intimate, more conducive to contemplation.

The woodwork and furniture of the room were massive and uniformly dark brown. Scattered on tables and on the bookshelves were odd treasures which father had collected: a war hatchet and scalping knife which had belonged to Joseph Brant; a broken link of the great chain stretched across the Hudson to keep the British from sailing beyond the Highlands; Lafayette's silver-scrolled pistol; a New Testament which father had said belonged to General Wolfe. The only stamp of authenticity which any of these pieces bore was father's word, and I had often wondered if father had not assigned them their places as museum pieces to keep my mother from throwing them out. Dust collectors, she called them.

Once the firelight lingered on a set of dark-spined, gold-lettered volumes on one of the bookshelves, and I knew that they were father's Cicero, and again on some fat red books which I could not identify for a time until the light touched them again and I almost said it aloud: "Montaigne."

The portraits recessed among the books on the walls were rectangular patches of black against the variegated spines of the volumes, all but the two flanking the fireplace—two of my ancestors clothed in colonial splendor, who glared imperiously down upon us in hawk-eyed disapproval.

I wondered what they were thinking of us: Jacob Bellnap, who had been granted, for his services to the Crown, most of the land which now comprised the Town of Highland Landing, and his grandson Elihu, who had been with Wolfe on the Plains of Abraham.

"Good cigar, Sam," Robert spoke softly, almost diffidently, as if he were on the verge of pleading with me to forgive him the bitterness of this homecoming. "Smoke away," he said. "Don't look at old Jacob like that. He'll swoop down and bite you."

"I was thinking about him, Robert, and about us. I wonder if he's pleased with us?"

"I don't know, Sam. I don't even know much about him. You and Father were the family historians. What was he like?"

I smiled and tilted the glowing tip of my cigar toward him.

"Just like you, Robert. Exactly. Don't you know you look like him?"

He glanced hurriedly at the portrait.

"Is that a compliment, Sam? I'll take it for one. I've always thought him a fine-looking man, even if he was rather fierce."

"Exactly like you, Robert. The eyes, mostly. Bellnap eyes—like a hawk's. Remember how Mother used to tell us you were a real Bellnap, because you had old Jacob's eyes? —yes, and Elihu's and Grandfather Robert's. Sometimes they skipped a generation, but they always came back. Only when you're angry, or determined, or displeased. Any strong emotion, Robert, and you're glaring like a hawk. Look in the mirror sometime."

He laughed uncomfortably. "Change the subject, Sam. That's just an old wives' tale, about the eyes. I don't put any stock in it."

"Look in the mirror," I told him. Or ask your wife, I thought. She'll be able to tell you.

Perhaps he sensed my thoughts, because he stared at me for a moment and then turned again toward the fire. We were silent once more.

It will always be between us, I thought. I'll never be able to look at him, speak to him, without arousing it. Even if I teach myself not to remember that she loved me, or said she did anyway—even if she walks into this room tonight and I realize that I don't love her any more, this bitterness will always be between Robert and me. And it may grow into hatred. Even if I fight against it, it may.

"Look here, Sam!" Davey called. He was making shadows with his hands in the firelight. "See that? Doesn't that look like a mallard rising from the marsh?"

"It will be good to get out in a duckboat again," I said. "Did you get a chance to go last fall?"

"A time or two," he answered. "With some of the fellows at school. But it wasn't like it used to be with you."

"We'll have to make up for all the time we lost—next fall when they start coming down from Canada. And you're plenty big enough now to use a 12-gauge gun."

"I've got all the guns cleaned and oiled and ready."

"Fine," I answered. "You know, Davey, there was a fel-

low named Andrews with me in prison—Bill Andrews, from Oneonta, across the mountains. He was captured with me, and we stayed together in Andersonville and later in Savannah and in Millen. He was a great duck hunter. We'd sit at night in our dugout, trying to swallow dry cornmeal, and we'd talk about how we'd go hunting together after we got exchanged and the war was over. We'd spend maybe twenty minutes at a time just explaining the best way to blind a duckboat or to load a shell when you went after mallards—but always the talk would get around to eating ducks. In the pen, our every second word was about food.

"We were quite famous for our conversations on cooking and eating ducks and partridge and woodcock. Everybody in the area would come and sit around and listen and once in a while venture a suggestion. But we were the authorities. Bill and I must have eaten a thousand imaginary ducks cooked a hundred different ways since a year ago this time, and then, when we'd finished one in our minds, we'd have to go back to the prospect of gulping down more of that disguised sawdust they fed us. Bill Andrews really liked duck hunting, though. Almost as much as Father or you, Davey."

"Did he come home too, Sam? Are you going hunting with him next fall?" Davey asked.

I heard the question, but I didn't answer it right away. I was thinking of the letter I would have to write, of the trip I would have to make later across the mountains to Oneonta, to tell Bill Andrews' parents how he had died.

Davey asked the question once again: "Sam, you going hunting with him next fall?" I could read in his eager face the words which weren't spoken: "And will you take me?"

"He's dead, Davey."

"He died in prison?"

"An old man in the Georgia militia did it—a bitter old man who spat on Bill's body and then went off to apply

for his furlough. They claimed they got thirty days at home every time they killed one of us."

"They didn't really, did they, Sam?"

"I don't know. We thought they did. They told us they did. I didn't blame them so much for that—they were ordered to shoot. But if they had been kind just once, or had cared for the sick decently, or had given us paper and pen to write home— We had nothing. And day after day the men died. I was in Andersonville itself for seven months. I saw forty thousand men come in the gates, and I saw thirteen thousand of them carried out dead. God knows how many have died since." My voice dropped away; I couldn't speak for a moment.

"I want never to see another man die." I almost shouted the words. "And I want never to see men live in filth and disease and hunger!"

Robert's voice came in mild reproval.

"Don't you know, Sam, that our prisons are just as bad?"

"They can't be! No sinkhole on earth could be as vile as Andersonville!"

"It's been in the papers. I didn't believe it at first, but time and again they wrote about our prisons. Every now and then for the past two years there has been a big hullabaloo about prison conditions. I don't know if anything has been done, but it sounded as if something should have been. The death rate was pretty high."

"Not as high as Andersonville!"

"Perhaps. But you're home now. You're free of it. Try to forget it."

"Free of it! Thousands of men dying of scurvy with no food but cornmeal, not even a doctor to look at them most of the time! Do you think I'll ever get the smell of that place out of my nostrils?"

"The entire Confederacy has had its privations, Sam. It's been a hard war for them."

"Privation is one thing," I cried. "Cruelty is another."

"From the stories the papers carried," Robert smiled, "I imagine the rebels were forced to be a little rough with some of your fellow prisoners. It seems to me from reading the papers that anyone unlucky enough to be captured was a bounty-jumper or a coward, if not an out-and-out traitor and criminal. What was it they called those who straggled and were caught? Coffee-boilers and blackberry-pickers?"

Then Robert laughed, and his voice assumed a high whine of self-pitying explanation which was an exact mimicry of so many I had heard: "I didn' know we was headed for a battle. My God, I jes' stopped to boil a leetle coffee and fust thing I knowed there's half of Lee's army abustin' out of the bushes."

I laughed with him. "You've missed your calling, Robert. You should have turned to acting. Edwin Booth could do no better. You do that so well, one would think you'd been captured at Seven Pines or the Wilderness."

His voice was barely audible as he answered.

"I wish I'd had the chance to be there, Sam."

I knew what he meant. He hadn't objected to my enlisting in the spring of 1861. Father was already ill then; only one of us could go. Without thought, when we talked it over I had assumed that I would go and he would stay home. He could take care of things. That was his job, the responsibility he had accepted.

"Be thankful that you weren't there, Robert. It was a rotten business, all of it."

"I hired a substitute for me in the draft, anyway. There was a deal of talk going around about my courage, Sam. At first, anyway. I didn't like it." Suddenly he sat upright in the armchair and snapped his fingers. "I'd completely forgotten, Sam! George Potter! He was captured, too. Uncle Jeff got the notice at the same time they told us you were

dead. George and Joe, both captured. Were they with you, Sam?"

I nodded.

"Both of them. In Andersonville."

George and Joe Potter were our cousins. Joe had joined the Fifth New York when I did. George, who had a wife and son, had joined us late in 1863; he had substituted for Robert in the draft, and had somehow managed to get assigned to our regiment.

"George came to me when he heard I was going to be drafted," Robert said. "He told me he was going, anyway, and he might as well take my place for three hundred dollars."

"Poor George," I answered. "Somebody stole it from him his first night in camp. Later, when he found out one cold wet morning what a rebel yell sounded like, he began to regret his bargain with you. I guess he never figured on doing any actual fighting. He surrendered to the first Johnny that caught up with him."

"Are they coming home, too, Sam?"

"Joe will be home, I suppose. Soon now. I haven't seen him in months. George is dead."

Robert stared at me for a moment. I heard Davey gasp.

"He died in prison?" Robert asked softly.

I nodded again.

"I shouldn't have agreed to let him go for me. I should have gone myself."

"There's no blame to take, Robert. Lincoln himself hired a substitute."

"Lincoln is a bit older than I am, Sam."

"George died in the war, Robert. He wanted to go. You had to stay here."

"It will be hard on Uncle Jeff. He's been talking about them coming home."

"I'll have to tell him tomorrow. There's more to it than

just his death. They got into trouble, George and Joe. It's a long story—I don't want to tell it now and then again to Uncle Jeff tomorrow, but I must tell you this. Joe was a little crazy the last time I saw him—all of us were, as a matter of fact. But Joe blames everything on us—the Bellnaps are the cause of all his misfortunes. He tried to kill me. He said he was going to kill you. If he comes home, you'll have to protect yourself."

"Why, Sam? What's the matter with him?"

"War," I answered wearily. "Prison. Sickness. Death. Take your choice. Whatever it is, it's not his fault. Come along with me tomorrow when I tell Uncle Jeff. You should know what happened. I don't want to tell it twice."

"All right, Sam."

David rose from his bench and spoke softly to us.

"I think I'll go up to bed now."

"Good night, Davey," Robert said absently.

"Good night. Good night, Sam."

I walked to the door of the library with him.

"Remember how I used to read to you before you went to sleep?" I asked, putting my hand on his thin shoulder.

"Sure I remember."

"Think you're too old for it now?"

"No, Sam."

"Well, I'll do it again. Just for old times. What will I bring?"

"Whatever you'd like, Sam. Poe, maybe—or Washington Irving?"

"No Poe. I'd have nightmares. I'll pick something of Irving's."

"All right. I'll wait for you. I won't be asleep, Sam."

I returned to my chair as Davey went out into the hall and started up the stairs. Robert was standing before the fire, holding his hands toward it, palms downward, as if to warm them. Finally he turned to look at me. The tip of his

forefinger slowly stroked his carefully clipped moustache. Somehow it was a friendly gesture, as if he were trying to concentrate on the most pleasing words to tell me about Martha and himself.

"What are your plans, Sam, or haven't you formed any?"

"Maybe I'll pick up Father's practice. I don't know. It's too soon to think about it. Maybe I'll go away. I can't tell you now, Robert."

"I've been trying to think of the right way to say this ever since I told you I was married, but there's no right way, no easy way." He paused.

I remembered how he had been fiddling with the newspaper or gazing into the fire or looking at me suddenly as if he had just found the words. And I thought I knew what he was trying to say. He wanted to tell me how sorry he was; he wanted to say that if Martha and I were still in love, he would give her a divorce.

"I think I know," I said. "It isn't necessary."

He shook his head and turned back toward the fire. "No, you don't know. You imagine I'm going to be gallant, to bow and step aside. I'm not! I love her as much as you do. I'm going to keep her!" His voice hardened. I was tempted to tell him to look in the mirror now—he'd see the hawk eyes. "If it had been any other way, Sam, I'd leave it up to her. But you were dead! She mourned for you and then fell in love with me. She's my wife, Sam. I don't want you to forget it."

She mourned for me! Ten months, I thought.

"All right, Robert! Don't worry about me or about her!"

To hide the tumult within me, I picked up my wineglass and sipped the last few drops of wine. Then I spoke over the edge of the glass. "What will we call it, Robert? The fortunes of war? Or the hazards of the chase?"

Then we heard the front door opening and the rustle and

stamp of feet on the doormat. There was a murmur of voices. I looked inquiringly at Robert. He nodded.

"Martha. She has a friend with her. Miss Bookstaver. Do you know her?"

I shook my head.

"She taught school out at Gardinerville. Now she's teaching here at the Academy."

Then I remembered. Martha had often spoken of her. I remembered that she had owned a private school for young ladies in Gardinerville, a small market town between Highland Landing and the mountains at the western end of the county.

There were steps in the hallway and Miss Bookstaver came through the door into the library. I rose from the armchair and bowed slightly. All I noticed then was that she was a slim dark woman. There were sure steps again beyond the doorway, and then she stood there framed in the shadows of the hall.

"Here is Samuel, my dear," Robert said softly. "He came in on the evening train."

Her voice was the same—calm, husky and yet musical—and the words rustled in the stillness like willow fronds in the dusk before a summer storm: "Hello, Sam. We've been waiting for you. I'm glad you are home."

4.

She stood beside the fireplace, head uplifted, immobile, seeming not to listen while Robert spoke to us, or rather to me, in low tones. He seemed to drawl the words, to dwell upon them individually, as if each were renewing in his mind the events they described.

I might have been as much a stranger as Miss Bookstaver, listening to his story with a guest's polite interest, if the way in which he told it were to be a guide. He mentioned that he and Martha's father had become increasingly allied in politics during the past year; he described her singing in the choir every Sunday at St. George's; he told about the quiet wedding they had in January; he said they had been forced to combine honeymoon and business unpleasantly in a trip to war-crowded Washington. Yet not once did he mention the reason why he spoke in low strained tones, the reason why she stood silently beside the fireplace, the reason why I sat slumped in the armchair staring alternately at him and at her.

I suppose he could not. Miss Bookstaver was listening to him, and certainly Robert was not going to reveal to her any signs of conflict between him and me.

And yet it was there; it was implied in his every syllable. There was something else; I could sense again that he was asking me to understand, and to accept the fact that she was now his wife.

Now I rose and began to pace back and forth on the edge of the shadows, between the bookshelves and my armchair opposite Robert, so that each time I pivoted I could see Martha's face, although not once since she had come in,

after that first moment in the doorway, had she looked directly at me. Her features did not move at all, but they seemed to be constantly changing as they reflected the restless glow of the coals.

Even though I had been prepared, it had been a shock to hear her voice, to see that well-remembered figure in the doorway, and to know that she was no longer mine. Yet I had remained composed, quiet, listening. My ability to dissemble was not surprising. It had been bred in my imprisonment, conceived of that imperviousness to despair, the carefully nurtured ability to turn pain aside, to deny that there was anything further to be offered which I had not already suffered. So now I waited and watched her face and listened to his voice flaying the raw edges of the wounds.

Miss Bookstaver rose from the rocking chair near the fireplace. Robert had ceased talking for a moment.

"If you'll excuse me," she said, "I'd like to go into the kitchen, Martha, and finish the ironing I started this afternoon. I must have it done if I'm to leave tomorrow."

"Can you light the gas, or would you rather have a lamp?" Martha asked.

"Don't bother about me. You just stay here and talk to Mr. Bellnap. I know you all have so much to say after such a long time."

When she was gone, Martha spoke to Robert. "Ann is going to move into town tomorrow. She found a nice place near the Academy. Two rooms and kitchen. It overlooks the river."

I looked at Martha once more. I barely heard her words. My gaze was on the long finely arched dark brows above the gray eyes which I could remember shining in excitement like burnished steel and at other times clouding with distant shadows. I watched her wide mouth splashed with the soft flame color of the burning coals. I knew that no matter why she had married Robert, I still loved her.

I tried to force my thoughts into her mind, to draw her eyes to me. I needed to know if she could understand my despair, if she could tell me with a glance that she loved me and always would. I knew that whatever she or Robert said now could not ease the tumult in my mind. I reassured myself that when she was able to speak to me alone, she would tell me why it had happened and that she still loved me. I even imagined that she would have some solution for us.

But she stood quietly, not looking at me, still appearing not to listen, while Robert's voice spoke softly once more, telling me an incident of their visit to Washington.

And then he paused again and she spoke without looking at either of us. Her words, however, seemed to be meant only for me, spoken slowly, carefully, as if I were a child she was teaching who must have the simplest explanation of some natural phenomenon.

"It was so wonderful for us to hear that you were alive, Sam. Last March they said that you were dead. Just a few words on a slip of paper. I didn't believe it for a long time —weeks and then months. But there was nothing, no word from you. They said 'missing and believed killed in action at—' What was the name of the town, Robert?"

"Somewhere in Virginia," Robert answered as if he too were instructing a child. "Near Richmond."

I never knew the name of that town either, I thought. Just a hamlet with a few buildings to burn.

"We clung to that word 'missing,' Sam," she continued. "Every day we waited and we heard nothing. We wrote to Washington. They told us very gently, very kindly, that as far as they were concerned you were dead. Not a word about your being a prisoner. We believed them, finally. We had to."

Now I spoke for the first time since she had entered, since my few halting words of greeting to her.

"Do you have my obituary?" I forced a smile. "I'd like to read about what you all thought of me."

"It's there in the Bible, Sam," Robert said. "If you don't like it, blame me. I took all the details down to Jimmy Witherwax at the *Statesman*. I'll get it for you."

"No, I'll look at it later."

Martha's voice broke in, quick now, higher in tone.

"And now Robert and I have been married two months."

"Just two months tomorrow," he said.

"We would have waited until you returned, Sam, if we had known. Wouldn't we have waited, Robert?"

His answer was whispered, scarcely audible, and it was accompanied by a gentle nod of agreement.

"Yes. We would have waited."

"But your letters from Annapolis were the first news that you were alive," she said, turning again to face me. As soon as she stopped speaking to Robert directly, her voice dropped to a whisper. The lights and shadows moved deceptively across her face; once I thought it was twisted with emotion, and then a moment later it was very calm.

"You didn't write to anyone, Sam. Surely you could have written home?"

"I tried. I wrote to you once and to my father. From Andersonville. I didn't think they'd send the letters through. Some of the men, I heard, got letters to their people. But most of the time there was no pen, no ink, no one to send the letter without a bribe."

"Strange that they didn't send lists of their prisoners, Sam."

"They should have." I made a gesture of futility. "Maybe it was a mistake. Maybe they misspelled my name or maybe they didn't bother with whatever list I was on."

"You're home now, Sam," Robert said. "Safe and well, although you're thin. The saddest thing about that false

report of your death was Father's grief. I'm afraid it hastened his end."

"You told him! Why, when he was so ill?"

"Wait, Sam," Robert said quickly. "I had to tell him—or, rather, he told me. Mrs. Malloy was still with us then—she and Jim left after Father died—and she screamed when I told her. And then Father called me and wanted to know what had happened. I wasn't going to tell him, but he guessed immediately. I thought he took it well, Sam, sick as he was. But then he didn't seem to fight any more. And as I told you earlier, he died very quickly."

We were all silent then. For a few moments I had the feeling that I was a stranger in an alien land; what had been a homecoming to peace had suddenly become another struggle, most vicious because I was forced to oppose my brother, and I was on the defensive in what promised to become—if I allowed it to be, if I remained to face it—a constant fencing, the thrust and parry and riposte, and I could take no other course than fall ever backward to defeat. And at that moment I did not want to fight. What did it matter, I told myself. He had won the battle before it started; he had Martha.

Robert rose from the armchair.

"It's getting late," he said. There seemed to be a note of relief in his voice that all through this conversation I had been content to listen, rather than voice what we had all been thinking.

"Sam," he continued, "your room is ready for you. Martha dusted and cleaned most of the week in there." A note of jocularity came into his voice. "I told her a veteran soldier who had spent so much time in rough camps and on the march wouldn't appreciate all her trouble, but she insisted."

"Thank you," I said. "Good night, Martha. And you, Robert."

"Good night, Sam," they said together.

I heard Martha go to the kitchen and I could hear her voice and Miss Bookstaver's in a few moments' conversation, and then Robert and Martha went upstairs.

When they were gone I rose and walked to the bookshelves. Here and there I slipped a volume from its place and leafed its pages. The books were mine; I knew it had been father's intention that the house should go to Robert, but he had told us that the books were to go with me if ever I should leave.

I found the blue-bound copy of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* exactly where father had kept it. There was a fine layer of dust on its slip case. I supposed a girl from town came in to help Martha with the housework. No one they could hire could be as efficient as Mrs. Malloy had been. For twenty-five years she and her husband Jim had worked for father and mother. I supposed they had finally bought the little fruit farm they had always talked of. That would be one of my first duties, to go and see them.

Despite the throbbing insistence that I think of Martha upstairs preparing to sleep in my brother's bed, I forced myself to remember the Malloys, to remember the care Mrs. Malloy had taken with these books, to recall all the hours I had spent in this room and yet had never managed to read enough.

Carefully I opened the volume in my hand and read the inscription written in black ink with a fine pen on the flyleaf: "To my good friend, Isaac Bellnap, on Christmas Day, 1851. W. Irving."

Then I laughed silently. That's great, I told myself. Your brother is in bed with the woman you love, and you're in the library making love to a book.

I returned to my chair with the volume, recalling how Mr. Irving had sat here on the day when I was ten years old, and had called me to him, patted me on the head and

given me a dollar for "a book, my boy. And get one full of pirates and adventures, none by Washington Irving. Mind you, now."

I put the book down on the arm of the chair, picked up the lamp, and went to the kitchen. Miss Bookstaver was ironing away industriously and humming *Oh, Susannah!* I had my first good look at her while she picked up another flatiron from the back of the stove and, wetting her finger with her tongue, tapped the ironing surface carefully. It hissed to her satisfaction.

"Good!" she exclaimed. "Don't stay up on my account, Mr. Bellnap. I'll be only a few minutes more. I'm not afraid to be down here alone."

"I'll be up for a while."

She was a slim woman of some indeterminate age, perhaps closer to forty than thirty, although she was still very good looking. Her hair was attractively touched with gray, and it was brushed back loosely from a side part, rather than gathered in a bun such as I had always considered standard equipment for schoolteachers. Indeed, she didn't look at all like a teacher. I wondered for a moment why she hadn't made some man a very good wife many years before this, and then I remembered Martha saying that she had supported her widowed mother for years. That was a good conversation point.

"Martha spoke to me of your mother, Miss Bookstaver. How is she? Is she with you in Highland Landing?"

"She died last month." She looked up at me with a nod of her head to toss her hair back into place. "That's why I've come to Highland Landing. I lived out in Gardinerville with her for fifteen years because she wouldn't live any place else. I hated every minute of it." She said it with such calm intensity that I thought for a moment that she wanted me to know that she hated her mother as well.

I changed the subject quickly. "Do you like it here?"

"I've only been here three days, but I think it's wonderful. Tomorrow I'm moving into my own place, down near the school. I'll be sorry to leave this house. It's wonderful, being with Martha again. She was my favorite student, you know."

After a few more comments about Highland Landing and Clinton Academy, I went to the cellar door and stepped carefully down the stairs. It was cold and dry down there. As I went down, the cobwebs looked like loosely woven gray cloth strips fluttering as I disturbed the still air. I selected a squat brown bottle from the cradles along the wall under the stairs. A swipe of my sleeve across the crusting of dust showed the roughly-printed label: "Old Highland County Apple Whiskey." I shook the dust from my sleeve and took the bottle upstairs.

"Will you join me?" I asked her.

"Why, Mr. Bellnap, schoolteachers don't drink whiskey!" she replied with a grin.

"This is good whiskey."

"That might make a difference. I'll tell you what I'll do. Give me two minutes more here, and I'll join you in the library. Promise you won't tell the Board of Supervisors."

"I promise."

A search in the china cabinet in the dining room brought forth two Waterford glass tumblers of a pint capacity. I took glasses and bottles back to the library.

Filling the bottom of one glass with the applejack, I held it up and watched the fire dancing grotesquely through it. Father was a Highland County man, all right, I thought. He liked his apple.

Then I thought of a little jingle we used to sing when we were boys:

Oh, we're from Highland County,
And we'd like to have you know

That Highland is the county
Where the luscious apples grow.

Oh, they call us apple-knockers,
And they needn't take it back,
Because the apple-knockers are the boys
Who make the applejack!

Then I raised the tumbler to Jacob Bellnap's portrait and saluted him.

"Your very good health, sir," I whispered.

I took a sip of the whiskey. The swift burning flow was of fond memory. Then I put the glass down and walked to the small table where the family Bible was kept. Among the leaves of family records I found the newspaper clipping I was looking for. It was dated March 6, 1864.

They wasted a lot of type, I thought as I unfolded the clipping. It was some twelve inches long. The headline was short and to the point: "SAMUEL BELLNAP KILLED IN BATTLE." Below that was a bank of smaller type: "Descendant of City's Founder Lost on Kilpatrick's Raid Around Richmond."

It went on to give a fulsome account of my virtues and accomplishments—Jim Witherwax had worked assiduously in imagining so much—and the rest of it concerned the family history.

I looked up again at old Jacob on the wall. And what do you think of that? I thought. They didn't say much more about you when you died. Of course, that was the New York papers. I suppose you believe it would have been better if I had been killed. Maybe I do, too.

I went back to my chair, thrusting the problem of Martha and Robert from my mind. Time enough to think about that.

With my glass in my hand, I read through the clipping

again. Jim had confused a few historical details about the family. I was undoubtedly the best source—indeed, the only one, now that father was gone—from which to draw all the facts on the Bellnaps of Highland Landing. When I was at Columbia College, I had chosen as my research project for a term paper the history of my family. My father and I had worked long and lovingly on it. Those things which I had discovered about my ancestors—their virtues and vices, the physical and spiritual characteristics which they had handed down to us—had a great deal to do with what I was to make of this homecoming to Highland Landing. I poured some more applejack into the tumbler, stretched my legs before me, and looked up at old Jacob.

Miss Bookstaver entered the room. "Sit still," she said as I started to rise. She picked up the second tumbler. "I'll take care of myself." She poured a good portion of applejack with a practiced hand.

"The doctor prescribed it for my mother for years," she said. "Medicine. I remember the first time I tried it. I went into the pantry and held the door tight so she wouldn't find me." A wry smile crossed her face. "I guess I thought it was a sin to drink. And then I found I liked it. So I've been drinking moderately ever since. This is the first drink I've ever had in anyone's company. I'm going to do as I please from now on."

I nodded. "No reason why anyone shouldn't make his own rules of conduct, Miss Bookstaver."

"I intend to." She smiled slightly. "I feel like a new person since I came here. I'm sure I'm going to like it. And I want you to call me Ann. I trust that won't shock your brother. He addresses me very formally as Miss Bookstaver."

"I'll agree if you'll call me Sam."

I tried not to watch as she sipped the whiskey. She made no faces, but obviously enjoyed it. I repressed a grin. I

liked Miss Bookstaver. She was refreshingly frank, and I thought I knew now where Martha had acquired that cool confident air I had always admired. It must have been from Miss Bookstaver.

She looked up from her drink and nodded at Jacob's portrait. "I saw you staring at him when I came in. Tell me about him, Sam."

5.

It was pleasing to me to sketch Jacob's history for her—how he had brought two shiploads of Palatine Germans to a grant given him for settlement by Queen Anne, how the Dutch had come up the river and settled there as well, and how they had built his house for him. I told about the wife who had come to him from England, and how he had sent his sons to England for their education and their wives.

"The third son went to Scotland on a hunting party when he was eighteen. He never came back, but fifteen years later a Scot, a refugee from Culloden, came here to call on Jacob. He told how Jacob's son died on the wrong side of the field at Culloden—the wrong side for a Bellnap to die—with tartan and claymore and even a burr in his dying words."

I told her about the old man's grandsons: one a doctor and a bachelor all his life because he wouldn't marry any girl his grandfather picked for him, another a lawyer who married his grandfather's choice and then chased every woman in the county and later died at Saratoga cursing the old man who had already been dead for seventeen years. And Elihu was another grandson. He had been with Wolfe at Quebec and in the Revolution was a colonel of the New York line, and later served in the House of Representatives.

"And you are descended from him?" Miss Bookstaver asked.

"Yes, he was the only grandson to have any children, a son named Robert, my grandfather, and a daughter who married Senator Osborne of New Jersey. Grandfather

Robert's only child was my father. The rest of us you know."

"Just the three of you left?"

"We have relatives here and there—some in the county here. There may be others in odd places in the world. Elihu Bellnap had a brother named Joseph who went with him to Oxford. I found a note in Elihu's journal: 'Joseph has left on a sea voyage. I tried to dissuade him.' They never heard of him again, but in my studies at Columbia I found an account of a mutiny followed by piracy aboard a British merchantman in the Caribbean in 1771. It was in a volume on maritime law published in London. The account ended with the sentence: 'The leader of these pirates, one J. Bellnap by name, was hanged at Demerara.' "

"You don't favor them as much as Robert does," she said, nodding at the portraits.

"I know. It's the eyes, mostly. What do you think about them? They always remind me of a hawk—not the color, but the expression."

"I see what you mean."

"Father told me that my grandfather had them. And Robert has. It's an optical illusion, because anyone who doesn't know the Bellnaps would never notice anything unusual. Maybe I'm so conscious of it because I'm familiar with the family history and therefore recognize the purpose and power and will to achieve."

"Perhaps you're right," she answered. "But there's something more." She stared at Jacob's portrait. "I know if he were alive, I wouldn't like him. I'd be afraid of him."

"A good many people were, I suppose."

"Your father," she questioned. "What was he like?"

"He was a lawyer, but not because he wanted to be one. I think he would have been content with Horace and Livy and Plutarch and Rousseau and Voltaire and Montaigne and Shakespeare, and to hear my mother tell it, with himself

as well. He was a historian, a naturalist of sorts, a hunter, a fisherman. He read just about everything published in America and England—most of these were his books—and he was a friend of Washington Irving, and George Catlin, and Jasper Cropsey—you've heard of the 'Hudson Valley school' of artists. Mr. Cooper was a visitor here years ago, but Father used to say he never thought much of Mr. Cooper's writing. No more do I."

"And you are like your father." It was more a statement than a question.

"I suppose so. I don't know how much I've changed in the past four years. At any rate, I'm not a real Bellnap any more than my father was. I don't think young Davey is either. Robert is the only one left—the only one with the resourcefulness and the drive and the business sense which old Jacob would have admired."

"I like Robert very much," she said softly. as she rose from her chair. "I'm very happy that Martha married him. I think it's an ideal marriage."

"Yes," I nodded without looking at her. "I suppose so. I'm sure they'll be happy."

"Good night, Sam. I hope to see you in the morning before I leave."

"Good night."

After she had gone, I poured myself a bit more of the applejack. Talking with Ann Bookstaver had recalled my boyhood, my youth, the days just before the war.

In boyhood I loved the land—not the very dirt which gave us sustenance, but the valley, the hills, the mountains, the streams. I had grown to love the town for its history and its associations with the great struggles of our people. When I walked into the livery stable which we owned (one of my grandfather's acquisitions), I did not wonder how the service could be improved or how many carriages and saddle horses had been let in the past week, but rather, how

were the horses? were they sleek and restive in their stalls? well-fed? groomed with care? has that new chestnut any speed? can he get up and go?

I was a boy who would never pass the hitching post down at the ferry building without running my hand across its smooth slick leather-conditioned length, because it gave me a shivering pleasure to do so and because I knew that George Washington had done the same thing whenever he crossed the river at Highland Landing. That was in Elihu's journal; he and Alexander Hamilton had wondered why Washington had always made it a point to do so.

Now I was almost glad that father was not here to see the bitterness which this homecoming had brought me. Even though I would have welcomed his tacit understanding and sympathy, I would not have wanted him to witness the silent conflict to which this marriage must give rise if I were to stay here.

Remembering father's ways recalled to me the last months we had spent together. That had been a good time; I had just fallen in love with Martha—it was one year after John Brown had been hanged, a year when one bright spark after another gave full warning of the fire which already burned fiercely, when South Carolina had already seceded from the Union and my father was shouting that they could not. Others were shouting too, but not all of us heeded them.

No, for us it was a good time—just a few months which for me were the happiest of my life.

6.

It was in January, 1861, that Robert and I accompanied father to the victory dinner for Judge Crist. There had been a time when my father had been scornful, even contemptuous of politics and politicians. Since 1856, however, when he had left the Whigs to support the brand-new Republican party and its candidate, John Fremont, he had shown a somewhat cynical but very active interest in county and state political affairs.

I suppose I mirrored his cynicism—although I probably had even less respect for feeders at the public trough. Robert held a viewpoint quite different from ours, which was not surprising. He told us that he had to be realistic in business, and that if being friendly to a few officeholders here and there was going to make money for the Bellnaps, then he would be as friendly as he could be. I thought he was overdoing it, until I saw an example of what Robert could do with political friendship. The railroad had refused to lay a short siding of track to our harness shop, saying that the amount of business didn't warrant it. Robert took me with him on a weekend visit to Albany. We attended one dinner party and one ball, and two weeks later there was a crew of section hands laying the track. I was quite impressed.

Father always asked that I accompany him to political functions. Usually I refused. This time I wanted to go. Perhaps it was presentiment on my part, but of course I don't believe in such things. The likely answer is that I

wanted simply to get a look at the newly elected judge from the western end of the county.

Judge Crist had just moved into Highland Landing to assume office. His home had been the hamlet of Cedar Bush, up in the foothills of the Catskills. He had a reputation for wit and wisdom, but these alone had not elected him. He had been swept into the county judicial post by the avalanche of Republican votes in Highland County the previous November. I recall father saying, as he and I dressed for the dinner, that he hoped Judge Crist wouldn't forget in his speech to give proper credit to Abraham Lincoln.

"Two country lawyers," father remarked. "I wish them both well."

"Oh, so you're no longer a country lawyer?" I smiled at Robert as I spoke. He was sitting in the armchair in father's room, all ready and looking very handsome in his black dinner jacket.

"Show me a little respect," father answered. "Who was it had Highland Landing incorporated as a city last year? Even your brother, for all his hobnobbing with politicians, couldn't do anything about that. And if I work for five years to make a town into a city, and if I live there, then I'm a city lawyer."

"Fine. But no one would know it from that dinner suit. When was the last time you wore it down to the livery stable?"

He pulled up the lapels of his jacket and sniffed.

"It does smell a little horsey, doesn't it? Well, it will make Homer Crist feel right at home."

"What kind of man is he?" I asked.

"Just what I said," my father answered with a quick grin. "A country lawyer. What kind of man is Lincoln? A few speeches, a stand on slavery—who can tell?"

"But you know Judge Crist, Father. And you know him, Robert. What do you think?"

"I only met him once or twice," Robert answered. "He has a quick tongue and a store of jokes. Father is the one who knows him. He stumped for him."

"Oh, I introduced him from the steps of a few country stores. I don't know him. Damn this thing! Come fix this collar button, Robert!"

After a moment, father continued: "Come to think of it, though, he's a fisherman."

"Well, then," I said. "We know he can lie as well as we can. What else?"

"You study him tonight," father told me. "Then you decide for yourself."

People were already entering the dining room of the Huguenot Hotel when we arrived. Most of them we knew: father was very busy trying to avoid losing his arm in political handshakes and shrinking away from the full force of political backslaps. Although the election was two months behind us, the flush of first victory was still high on the faces of these jubilant members of the infant Republican party. Not many of them seemed worried about secession, although there was a deal of loud talk about it.

I stood aside, watching the crowd and nodding with a smile to those who knew me. Not many of them bothered to approach; I was far less important to anyone there than father and Robert were. I watched with much secret pleasure Thomas Duncan, a portly Negro who was major-domo for all the Huguenot's banquets. Thomas bowed slightly to each group which entered the dining room—his deep voice solemn, almost severe, as he greeted them with polite reserve.

"I think that Thomas disapproves of us," Robert said softly. "We're not quite good enough to deserve his best services. Wherever he was before he came north—Mississippi, Georgia—they did these things with more grace and decorum."

"Mississippi," I said. "You're wrong, Robert. He doesn't disapprove." I caught Thomas' eye and winked at him. Very sedately, without a pause in his greetings, he winked back.

"I don't think I am," said Robert. "Look at him! Just as proud as an old peacock."

"Proud. Yes. You see, he's a Republican, too."

"How do you know?"

"He told me, of course. He hopes to vote some day. He's our client. We're trying to help him buy his son's freedom. His son is a slave in Natchez. Thomas says he hopes he can bring him north before the war starts. He insists there's going to be a war."

"I think he's right, Sam."

"So do I. But who can tell what Lincoln's going to do?"

As we passed into the dining room, Thomas bowed and murmured, "Good evening, Mr. Bellnap. And to you, gentlemen."

"Are you going to sing, Thomas?" Father asked.

"I believe I am, sir."

"The only reason I came, Tom," I said.

"Thank you, sir." Then in a whisper as I passed. "There's going to be young tom turkey, Sam, with cranberries. And James has a bottle of applejack."

Inside the doorway, father paused and spoke to a few people. We waited for him without joining the conversation.

It was easy to pick Judge Crist from the crowd. He was shaking hands as fast as he could drop one and grab another, and his long bony face was wrinkled into a huge smile which seemed to get larger every second.

At the far end of the high-ceilinged room, which was filled with tables proper with white linen, I saw a long table set off with an enormous punch bowl. I knew that the teetotallers among us had insured its contents against adul-

teration, but I had been to these affairs before. And Thomas Duncan had already given me the answer.

"Robert, I'm going to need added strength if I'm to shake the judge's hand," I said, nodding toward the punch bowl. "Join me?"

"Go right ahead, Sam," he answered absently, as he neatly dodged a descending palm. Two city officials tackled him at once, one from either side.

I maneuvered up to the attendant of the punch bowl, who I presumed was the James of whom Thomas Duncan had spoken. I made a quick motion with my hand to indicate three fingers of apple and a bit of water added. Magically he produced the mixture from the neighborhood of his knees. I wondered why politicians were such hypocrites; they wanted to drink, but they wanted the bottles hidden. Of course, Highland Landing had more than its share of bluenoses.

As I turned to look again at the door, I saw her for the first time.

I cannot pretend that I fell in love with her as soon as I saw her, because I didn't. All that mattered then was that I talk to her, find out who she was, and why I hadn't ever seen her before.

She was standing with her back to the wall, her hands clasped behind her, watching the judge continue to shake every hand which appeared anywhere near him. Her dress was white, I remember. It went well with the black hair drawn smoothly back but not quite enough to hide the waves which reflected the lights of the many candles and lamps. I don't recall deciding that she was beautiful; I saw that she was tall and slim, that she had a good figure, and I saw her eyes—probably they impressed me most even then, although I couldn't have known how they could tease and taunt and then be tender in an instant; how they could flaunt emotions, hide them, cause them to vanish and then return immediately.

Eighteen, I thought. No, maybe nineteen. And I've never seen her before.

It didn't seem necessary to waste any time with formalities in the middle of all that hullabaloo. I just stepped up and said, "Hello."

"How do you do," she said after a startled look. Several weeks later she confessed that she had been watching Robert and me all the time, hoping that someone would introduce us. If they did not she was prepared to do it herself. I recall how flattered I was at that, until she added with a dissembling smile that she hadn't noticed me as quickly as she had Robert.

I liked the way her wide mouth remained mobile after she had spoken the first few words, as if there were more to come, as if what she had already said would be nothing to what she might say if she were so inclined. I liked the way her eyebrows slanted above the gray eyes. Her skin was not the pale hue so favored by city girls who never venture into the sun without a parasol. This late in winter, it still held the suggestion of a summer spent in the open air. And her voice was better than I had hoped for—that husky and yet musical vibrance, as if she had done too much talking the day before, or was just recovering from a cold.

"I'm Samuel Bellnap."

"How do you do?" she said again with a faint smile, with that air of something left unsaid.

"We've never met before, have we?" That was the customary thing to say under such circumstances.

She didn't give the usual answer: "I don't believe so." Instead, she said in amused impatience: "Of course we haven't."

That flustered me. "Well, I'm glad we have now," I mumbled.

"Thank you," she answered, disconcerting me once more

by calmly accepting the compliment instead of returning it by saying: "So am I."

"This can't go on all night. I want to know your name."

"Of course. Martha Crist."

"Oh," I ventured, nodding toward the still surging crowd of people around the judge.

"That's right. My father."

"Why aren't you up there at his right hand?"

"I don't like crowds. Besides, my mother's there. I'm afraid I'll have to go up in a minute or so. I'm supposed to sit at the speakers' table."

"I'll fix it," I said. "Don't move a step. I'll be right back."

She didn't even protest—just nodded assent as if it were perfectly proper for me to interfere. I told father that the committee had assigned him to the speakers' table and he said that was fine and he hoped they didn't ask him to say a few words; then I told Mayor Hasbrouck, chairman of the committee, that Judge Crist had demanded that father be seated near him. It took about three minutes, and then I was guiding her to our table, feeling her arm resting lightly on mine, hearing her ask me amusedly if I thought anyone would disapprove of her for doing this.

"Old friend of the family," I answered solemnly. "Don't worry about it."

And it was as a family friend that I introduced her to the several other people who were assigned to our table.

"You remember Miss Crist," I said to Robert.

"Of course," he answered with a smile, too much welcome in it for my taste, considering that he had never even heard of her before. "How have you been since last we met?"

"Very well indeed, Robert. And you?"

Even I was surprised that she knew his name. As for Robert, it was one of the few times I had ever seen him unable to think of a ready reply.

"Fine. Oh, fine," he mumbled. I suppose he was wondering whether he was expected to address her by her first name also.

I'm sure I was in love with her by that time—the rest of the evening in the candlelight was like a warm summer dusk in which there is gentle laughter somewhere far away and yet strangely nearby; in which figures move slowly, remotely, in a kind of tinted haze; in which words rise and fall and are lost and then return to be wondered at and then forgotten. Thomas Duncan must have been singing, because I can recall his wonderful baritone, and her admiration for it.

After dinner, father spoke his few words—about fifteen minutes of them—and several others spoke also, followed by a rousing oration by the judge. I didn't listen to any of it.

When it was over, the handshaking began again. Martha said a few words to her mother, a thin quiet woman who seemed awed by all the gilt and glitter. Then I took Martha's arm and we left the hotel. We decided to walk to her home.

The Crists had moved into an old Dutch stone house on Montgomery Street, only four blocks from the Huguenot Hotel. It took us more than an hour to get there.

We walked north along Liberty Street, turned into Grand Avenue, looked at the Bellnap house through the elm trees, and stood hand-in-hand discussing the merits and demerits of the cupola—she sided with Mr. Downing and I with father.

While we were standing in the road, father and Robert drove up in a light buggy. They stopped beside us, and I started to introduce her to father.

"We're old friends, Miss Crist and I," father interrupted. "We met several times during the campaign."

"You two get in the buggy," Robert said. "We'll have coffee in the house, and then I'll drive Miss Crist home."

"Thank you," Martha said. "That's very kind of you."

"A fine idea, Robert," I agreed. "Let me correct you, though. I'll drive Miss Crist home."

She didn't permit us to argue; gravely she said that we both might drive her home.

"What I can't understand," father said, "is why you let this young idiot walk you away out here on such a cold night."

"He wanted to show me the cupola in the moonlight," Martha answered with laughter in her voice.

For the first time in the twenty-one years of my life I heard father admit that his cupola might be out of keeping with the house. "Looks silly, doesn't it? Like Abe Lincoln with a bowler hat. Maybe Andy Downing was right—"

Next evening I walked down to her house after dinner. Her mother and father were out visiting, and I suggested to Martha that we take another walk. As we were leaving, Robert drove up in an enclosed carryall from the livery stable.

"If I'd known you were coming down this way, I'd have saved myself a walk," I told him.

"We're going out for a stroll—it's such a beautiful night," Martha said. "Won't you come with us, Robert?"

My brother concealed his disappointment gracefully.

"No, not tonight, thanks. I thought I might call and pay my respects to the judge, if he's not busy."

"Oh, he's not home this evening," she said. "Why don't you come walking with us?"

"Some other time, perhaps."

"By all means, Robert," I interposed. "Some other time!"

Down on the bluff above the river, we sat for a long time on the thick rail of the wooden fence which enclosed the huge trunk of Jacob Bellnap's Balm of Gilead tree. His wife had planted the slip in her new home, and the giant tree now stood alone in a little grassy park on the bluff, a

landmark which could be seen for miles by river travelers.

We sat watching the flickering lights of Mountainville across the river, and listening to the mournful yapping of a fox somewhere along the riverbank.

"This is Hessian Bluff," I said. "My great-grandfather Elihu Bellnap killed a Hessian deserter under this very tree. People say his spirit haunts the bluff. I know a dozen people who claim to have heard him; a couple say they have seen him."

"What had he done to be killed?" Martha asked.

"I've often wondered. Elihu's journal gives the only account I've been able to find, and he said simply: 'This evening shot to death the Hessian we have been hunting. He paid for his inhuman crime, but I am sorry to have done the deed. He fired first.' "

"Would that be your great-grandfather's conscience speaking?"

"I don't know. He hated war and killing. Some day I'll have old Willy Graham—the city's foremost consumer of applejack—tell you how he wrestled with the Hessian under this tree. Willy claims he won the match, and then the Hessian climbed the tree and vanished."

She shivered and looked up into the tangled mass of bare branches.

"Are you cold?" I asked, moving closer.

"No, just frightened at the prospect of wrestling with a ghost."

"He hasn't been seen or heard in years. People are beginning to forget the old legends."

We discussed many things in that hour or so: the beauty of the river in the moonlight; the poetry of Lord Byron; hunting and fishing; politics; Joseph Brant's raid into Highland County during the Revolution; the petty nature of people from New Jersey (she said she didn't know any, but was prepared to agree with me), the fine town of Cedar

Bush and the fine town of Highland Landing; how her grandmother had milked ten cows morning and night at the age of seventy-five.

She told me she was a firm abolitionist, and said it made her father angry—he insisted that Garrison and the rest were scoundrels and warmongers. He favored compromise to avoid bloodshed. My own belief was somewhere near the middle—for the total abolition of slavery, and yet willing to compromise reasonably to avoid fighting.

"John Brown was a great man," she declared.

"Perhaps. But violence gained him nothing."

"For hundreds of years, Sam, people will remember his name."

"I wonder. If this blows over, he will be forgotten."

"Listen," she exclaimed. I was quite silent while her husky voice spoke the last words he had written: " 'I, John Brown, am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land: will never be purged away: but with Blood. I had as I now think: vainly flattered myself that without very much bloodshed: it might be done.' "

We were silent then for a long time, still holding hands, still sitting on the fence rail. Then she whispered: "God rest his soul."

I nodded, still hearing the words as she had said them, with their meaning implicit as it had not been when first I heard them—I think that for the first time I knew what John Brown had seen racing across the sky that morning of his execution: the four bloody years ahead.

As if she had been reading my mind, she said: "There will be a war, Sam. Soon."

"Yes," I said. "I'm afraid you're right."

And even while this sober conversation was progressing, I admit that my mind was toying with another subject: Robert and the carriage—his promise of "some other time."

I called to mind the experience of many hunting trips:

where all the hunters are good marksmen, the one who fires the first shot gets the deer.

In the meantime, she asked me if I thought she could get a position teaching in Highland Landing schools.

"You're a teacher?" Somehow I couldn't understand how one so young and pretty could be a schoolteacher. When I had attended Clinton Academy, all the teachers had been men. It was only in the past few years that Highland Landing had given women any place in the educational system.

"I've not much experience, but I'm qualified for elementary grades, at least."

"Easiest thing in the world," I said. "I'll send you to Mr. Winkle at Clinton Academy. They have a department for young children. Mr. Winkle's daughter is there, and I'm sure she needs an assistant."

"No, Sam. I'll go myself. I don't want you to ask for me."

"Nothing doing. What good is being a Bellnap in this town if you don't use it once in a while? Father can't stand the sight of Mr. Winkle, and he knows it. He bows and scrapes. Afraid for his job. That's what angers father."

"Why is that?"

"My father is chairman of the board of supervisors."

"I don't want a job through someone's influence. I'll get one myself."

"You're being unfair, Martha," I laughed. "Consider Mr. Winkle's plight. Imagine how he'd feel if the future Mrs. Samuel Bellnap went to teach at some other school. He'd worry about it for months."

She was silent, staring at me, with her lips working as if she didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Then she said abruptly: "Don't say that, Sam!"

I jumped down from the fence rail.

"Say what?"

"Please, Sam. I don't think it's very funny."

"I didn't mean it to be, Martha. And don't argue with a lawyer."

I held up my arms and she jumped easily to the ground. I held her gently, feeling her shoulders tense under my fingers and her body held rigidly on tiptoe, as if she were poised for flight.

"I've only known you since last night!" she said pleadingly, with no trace of that self-confidence to which I was already accustomed.

"Two days or two years, Martha. I love you. That's the way it is."

The words were so familiar to my lips that I might have said them a thousand times before, and yet I never had.

"No! No!" she whispered.

I leaned my face down to her. She pulled backward, still tense, rigid, forcing herself against my restraining arms. I waited. She whispered "No!" once more, and I released her.

She didn't turn away, but stood there looking into my eyes wonderingly. Instantly my arms were around her again. I was kissing her; the tenseness was gone; her body was pliant, and the black hair came loose, falling across her face. Then she tore her lips free and kissed my cheek and my eyes and said, fiercely now: "I love you. I love you. We love each other!"

Long afterwards she told me how it had been with her: "I had always loved you, Sam. I just had never met you. All those years I knew I was going to meet you, and then I did."

This time it was she who kissed me. I could feel her warm fingertips touching my ears and my neck. Her lips were soft and full, moving against mine as if she were still saying the words.

Then she was gone, running down the road.

When finally I caught her, she was crying. I tried to

soothe her, but she brushed me away. She attempted to rearrange her hair with one hand while dabbing at her face with a handkerchief in the other.

"All right! Go ahead and laugh!" she cried. "And go tell your brother he can try next. Tell him how easy it is to fool country girls. Tell him how stupid I am!"

I put my hand on her arm, trying to swing her around to face me.

"Let me alone! I'll go home now, if you'll tell me which way it is!"

"Martha, listen to me. I said I love you. Will you marry me?"

Her voice was puzzled, questioning.

"You meant it, Sam?"

"Certainly I meant it, darling. I've never said it before to anyone. I'd like to say it again, but you'll have to answer me this time. Will you marry me?"

"Sam! Oh, yes, I will!"

So again it was like it had been before. No, I'm wrong—it was never the same—this time she was laughing and sobbing at once. Then the whispers were there again. I am sure I was whispering too.

Later, as we walked along Montgomery Street, she stopped and turned to me.

"Oh, Sam!" she exclaimed in a dismayed tone.

"What's the matter?"

"How can I marry you and be a teacher, too?"

"There's no law against it, darling."

"No, I can't do both at once. I couldn't do a good job at either. And I do so want to be a teacher." She paused. "Can't I teach for just a little while, Sam?"

"Teach as long as you like, darling. It will be all right. Anything you want is what I want. Just so we get married soon."

"But we'll have to wait, Sam. At least a year! I'm only

eighteen. Mother would insist on it, and so would father." Again she paused, and then exclaimed gleefully: "And while we're waiting, I can teach."

"You can go talk with Mr. Winkle tomorrow, but we won't wait a year. Not even six months. How about next week?"

"No, Sam." She took my hand and tucked it with hers into the pocket of her coat, twining her fingers in mine. "I won't marry a man I don't even know, even if I do love him. And my mother and father wouldn't let me. We'll spend a few months learning all about each other. And all girls want a nice wedding, even the ones who say they don't for one reason or another. The weeks of preparation, the ceremony that goes with it. Those are nice things to remember all your life. I want to have it in the paper about our engagement, and I want to plan the wedding carefully."

"We can do that, and still be married next week. We can have it in the New York papers, if you'd like that."

"Don't keep that talk up, Sam! I won't change my mind. Why, we'll even have to wait a while before we tell anyone besides our families. People would talk."

We were at the gate of her house. I think that it was then for the first time I realized what a cold night it was. It seemed funny that I hadn't noticed it before. I wondered if in later years it would seem romantic to have proposed on a bleak deserted street with the temperature almost at the freezing point.

She led me up the steps before speaking further. Then she turned to face me.

"I won't have people talking about me and about you. We'll wait. Kiss me now, dear, before we go inside to tell them. I'm almost afraid to announce it; they'll think we're quite insane."

So we waited, because in that time and in that town one could not be married without proper obeisance to the

rigmarole through which courtship became engagement and, in turn, marriage.

I told father and Robert the next morning at breakfast.

Robert halted his coffee cup halfway to his lips and stared at me.

"So soon, Sam?" Then he smiled and added: "You didn't give me a chance to show her the other side of the family."

Father laughed and said: "Sam, how are you going to support a wife?"

"You're going to make me a partner, Father."

"Yes, in another year. No sooner."

"Then you'll have to increase my salary."

"Not until you earn more. You're just a law clerk, Sam, and not a very good one."

"All right. She'll have to share my poverty. We'll move right in with you."

Father grinned. "I'm glad to hear this, Sam. She seems to be a sensible girl. But don't rush things. Wait a couple of days before you get married."

I shook my head dolefully. "She wants to wait a year."

"Fine. The way you spoke, I thought maybe the wedding was this afternoon. She's pretty, Sam. Reminds me a good bit of your mother. You ask her and her parents out to dinner some evening soon. We'll have a party."

She did get a position at Clinton Academy, and I saw her at noon almost every day. We met for a half-hour at lunch in the little tearoom of the Huguenot Hotel, where a few elderly ladies smiled benignly upon us and an occasional jury ate hurriedly in embarrassed silence and clumped back to the courthouse across the street.

Her parents and my father thought it wise to withhold the announcement of our engagement for a while. A few people knew it. Sometimes we met Mr. Winkle near the school—his mind probably ran to other ideas, since he had hired her at my suggestion—I often thought I detected a

smirk (or perhaps leer is a better word) skirting the edges of his cordiality.

We took long walks in the evenings, or when the weather was bad, we sat by the huge fireplace in her low-ceilinged living room, popping corn or roasting chestnuts. Often her parents were there—her mother was a slim gray self-effacing person who always sat quietly, listening with obvious admiration and respect as the judge interminably voiced his opinions on states' rights, abolition (he was a moderate man, he invariably said, and then immediately added that William Lloyd Garrison should be jailed for agitation), the benefits of self-education (witness himself and the greatest man in the world, Abraham Lincoln), the dispensation of justice (at which he confessed himself adept), the iniquities of Jefferson Davis, Alexander Stephens, and assorted Southern politicians, and the health-giving qualities of that world-renowned beverage, Old Highland County Brand Apple Whiskey.

Whenever he reached that subject, as he always did eventually, he rose and winked at me: "Let's test a little of my stock, shall we, Mr. Bellnap?"

"Yes, sir," I always answered. "I'd enjoy it."

Despite Mrs. Crist's quiet protests, he would bring out the bottle with a flourish, pour several ounces into two wine-glasses, and remark: "A little law and a lot of applejack will go a long way, Counselor."

"Yes, sir," I would reply. "Your health."

He was pompous, a little too proud of his rough-hewn ways, and overly fond of stressing mountain virtues, but I liked him. He had the proper mixture of minor faults and minor virtues to make him exactly what he was—a good politician. I thought him honest and capable—and he was Martha's father. As I say, I liked him.

7.

Often in that spring of 1861, Martha and I would go to the Academy of Music on Broadway in Highland Landing, where touring companies brought the latest plays. I, with my New York experience and from the vantage point of twenty-one years, viewed the acting, productions, and playscripts with just the amount of superciliousness I thought appropriate, while Martha loved everything she saw in the range between a rollicking minstrel and Edwin Forrest's Othello. She used to rage at me because I wasn't impressed. She was right, of course. They were very good companies—the best in the country, really—and I enjoyed them as much as she did even though I'd never admit it.

When the weather became more clement, I would get a buggy from the livery stable and we would drive in the evenings out into the country, or to Jefferson Heights on the south side of town, where in the warm days of April we could lie in the tall soft grass on the bluff above the town and the river, watching the white puffs of cloud hanging listlessly far above, or turning to see the bay below dotted with a few sails. And we would whisper softly, intensely, searching each other's eyes as we said the words:

"Sam, do you honestly believe any others were ever so much in love?"

"No one, darling. Ever."

"And will we always be happy, as happy as this?"

"Always."

Yet we didn't do anything about our plans to marry. After a month or so in the beginning, I became content; there was no hurry. Plenty of time for two people so young

—all this was so agreeable, unhurried, that I shared her view that it would be wise to wait.

Now in the South, however, the muttering had grown to thunder. Sumter had just been taken. People were talking war.

We didn't think of war:

"Martha, do you know, I've decided to be Governor of New York one day. Would you like to live in Albany?"

"Oh, yes, dear. Ann Bookstaver told me about the Governor's mansion. Ann was my teacher at Gardinerville. She was there once years ago. What is Albany like, Sam?"

"It's a town like any other—they have buildings; the river is there, but it's smaller and not so beautiful. Fishing's pretty good in the lakes up north."

"Are governors rich, Sam?"

"Depends on how honest they are. I'd be an honest one, I suppose."

"Not too honest, Sam. I'd want a coach with four horses and a mahogany bed with a canopy and seventeen servants to wait on me. How dishonest would that make you?"

"Oh, maybe a couple of canals, or a new highway."

"It sounds fine, Sam. Mrs. Bellnap, the Governor's lady. I'd like that very much. But there's one thing. My father wants to be governor, too. What will we do about that?"

"Oh, let him have it first. There's plenty of time for us. Common courtesy, too; he thought of it before I did. I just thought a moment ago that we've never had a governor in the family. I suppose we should have."

She chewed thoughtfully on a stalk of timothy.

"You're very proud of your family, aren't you, Sam?"

I nodded. "I suppose I am. Perhaps it's because of my fondness for history—my family did a lot to build this city, even the state."

"And do Robert and your father mind your marrying a girl with no long line of famous ancestors?"

"Of course not! Whatever gave you that idea?"

"Just thinking. Father has often told me how his father arrived in Cedar Bush and found that little farm up in the stones and cedars and blueberry bushes. He worked it day in and day out—Sundays too—for ten years until he dropped dead in the dusk one day after beating his horse with his fists because he and the horse together couldn't move a rock which weighed as much as the horse did."

"And then your father took over?"

"No. He wouldn't. He told my grandmother that he was never going to grub his life away in those hills. And he went off to Kingston to be a lawyer. He's told you about that."

Indeed he had. It was one of the things I admired in him, that story. He had spent five years in Kingston, over in Ulster County. He became a lawyer. That's what he went for. He spent five years clerking for an absent-minded old shyster. At least it was called "clerking." He had to be janitor, handyman, messenger, and a dozen other things for the old man to whom he had enslaved himself, and try to get enough money in whatever spare time he had to keep himself in food and clothes. He cooked and sewed and chopped wood in the shack on Rondout Creek in which he lived, and he read every book he could get his hands on. He hunted and fished to live cheaply, and he stole onions, squashes, carrots, corn, grapes, anything else which might grow in Kingston gardens—it wasn't really stealing, he said, because without it he would have given up and gone home a failure. Five years of clerking and he was a lawyer. He didn't know what to do. He was a bumpkin, he said. A hayseed who didn't belong in the clean neat sophisticated atmosphere of Kingston. (It wasn't until late in the 1850's that he first heard the stories about Abraham Lincoln and began to think that being a country boy might pay dividends.) So he went home to Cedar Bush to practice the law as well as he could.

"So you see," she told me, "I have no family history. People will say: 'Who is she? Crist? I don't know any Crists!' And you'll have to tell them I'm the granddaughter of William Crist, who came over from Belfast in 1815 and couldn't read or write!"

"My darling, am I marrying your grandfather? Your father? These people who think family trees are important? I love you! And as for your grandfather—who was it who built this country, if not people like him? He did as much as anyone in my family. And isn't your father a respected and influential man? Didn't you just tell me he's going to be Governor? Don't let me hear any more such nonsense! Talk about us, not about a row of gravestones or a few lines in a history book."

During those talks, I learned about her childhood in Cedar Bush, and I came to understand the ambition which her father had instilled in her when she was a child; I realized that she wasn't really joking when she said she wanted to be the governor's lady and to have a coach and four horses, a canopied bed, and a score of servants.

She was her father's daughter, that was plain to see. He had always been proud of her, of her dark beauty, her slim lithe body, her quick mind. She told me how he had supervised the making of her clothes, how he started to educate her to be a lady, or at least a mountain lawyer's conception of a lady, even before she could understand his words.

I could picture how he had paraded her to church through the hamlet on Sunday mornings; he tended her cuts and bruises; he defended her with his lawyer's guile from the infrequent punishments threatened by her mother; he took her fishing with him, camping, blueberry picking on Sam's Point in the mountains above the valley.

"He had a small office in Cedar Bush," she said. "It was only a cubbyhole behind the postoffice. It was dark and cool there, and I used to build tunnels with his law books

and listen to him orate at the farmers who brought him their troubles. I'm sure, Sam, that some of them came in just to hear him talk. I can imagine what they said to their wives after a visit to Father's office." Her voice changed into the deliberate, clipped speech of a Highland County farmer: "Was over to the lawyer's t'day. That new one. Name of Homer Crist. Son of that feller had the farm up on the mountain there a few years ago. Got the gift of gab, all right. Talk a cow out of a pea-patch without raising his voice."

I gathered that even as a child she was quiet, speculative, as if she were content to let her father take care of the talking while she listened and wondered and then formed her own opinion.

During the first few weeks that I knew her, I teased her often about being a country girl because she seemed so intensely interested in things which I had always taken for granted: the snobbish social customs of the people who lived on Grand Avenue, the way our silver was set on the table, the tone in which we addressed servants (she seemed quite amazed that Mrs. Malloy took advantage of any occasion to upbraid my father and me for being "natural-born lazy"), the clothes worn to church on Sunday by the ladies in St. George's congregation. I didn't know whether to laugh or be properly penitent when she told me seriously: "I must know all about these things if I'm to be your wife, Sam. So please don't tease me when I ask what may seem to be silly questions."

Some evenings we went to dinner at the Huguenot Hotel —she loved the glitter and the starched linen tablecloths and the waiters hovering nearby and the fine food served under the watchful supervision of Thomas Duncan. Sometimes she hummed the tune which was being played by the piano and two violins; her face would glow with happiness, and she would lean across to me and whisper: "I love you, Sam."

Often I took her to my favorite inn, a place down by the river south of town, which was operated by a retired actor who had developed a love for French cooking during many years in Paris and had brought it home to the Hudson Valley. It was a tiny place, dark and smoky, but the food was wonderful.

The weeks went by, and now we couldn't avoid noticing the young men enlisting every day. Everywhere I went the talk was of war. Companies were raised in Highland County. Bands played on the streets. Speakers whipped the enthusiasm of those who weren't quite sure that it would ever amount to anything. Every amateur general, and there seemed to be one on each street corner, talked of the South getting its comeuppance in brief time.

"Two months and I'll be home again, Ma. Let me go now, before it's all over–"

"Traitors, all of them! Whip the bastards first and then hang 'em! That's all I've got to say. We should hang every last traitorous one of them!"

"The Union, I say! That's what matters. Slaves or no slaves, they can't break up the Union! We won't let them."

"Whatever does the President want with seventy-five thousand men?"

April had become May and soon it was June, and still the war was little concern of mine. Such an attitude was strange, I suppose, since a few months ago Martha and I had been able to speak gravely of the signs of conflict and the troubled days ahead. Now those thoughts were farthest from our minds. However, I think we had reason enough. Anyone who has been wholly in love, in love in the springtime, can understand. We lived in a world where a few fragmentary sentences, a word or two, would suffice for hours–a time when we saw all of the universe in each other's eyes–an intimate time, exclusive, isolated from everyday events around us.

Then one morning at breakfast, Robert spoke to me with a seriousness rare even for him.

"Sam, have you noticed that Father is ill?"

"No," I answered absently, thinking it some minor indisposition. "Something he ate?"

"Listen, Sam! I think he's quite sick. He's been losing weight. He looks drawn–he's lost his color."

"No, I hadn't noticed, Robert. What does the doctor say?"

"Byrnes? Well, you know how Byrnes is. Father won't see another doctor. Poor old Doc Byrnes is half-drunk every time he comes."

"Do you think it's something to worry about?"

"Perhaps not yet. But there's something else."

"What is it, Robert? Business?"

"Are you going to be married soon, Sam?"

"We haven't decided when. Why?"

"I just wondered. I thought you'd be thinking of going off to the war."

"The war, Robert! Whatever gave you that idea? I don't want to go to war. It won't last, anyway. That's what everybody says. What do you think?"

"It will last, Sam. For a long time. Maybe two years. I expected that you'd be planning to go."

"I'd be a poor soldier, Robert."

"One of us will have to go, sooner or later. With Father ill, I had better stay here and take care of him."

"Do you want to go?"

"Frankly, I do," he said, smiling. "The flag waving of the past few months has affected me."

"Well, go ahead then! I'll stay home. I suppose you're right. One of the family must go off to be a hero. I admit I haven't given it a thought."

"I'm afraid it will have to be you, Sam. But wait until they call you. Mind what I say–it's going to last a long

time. And if Father's going to be seriously ill, it would be better if I stayed with him."

"All right, Robert. I'll think about it."

A little consideration showed me that Robert was right. One of us should enlist. Everything considered, it had to be me. Even young David, with whom I had little time to fish and roam the woods that spring, asked me if I was going to be a soldier. When I said I might, he asked me if I would capture him a Confederate flag. Thinking perhaps in terms of the Battle of Agincourt, I promised to bring one home with me.

Now that Robert had shaken me from my perch high in the clouds, I began to pay more attention to talk of the war. Martha and I still didn't speak much about it, although I noticed now that she was listening intently whenever someone brought up the subject.

One day I was passing the courthouse, on my way to our Second Street offices, when I was hailed from a flag-draped booth which almost blocked the front entrance to the courthouse lawn.

"What about it, friend? Sign up to defend your country and lick the dirty rebels!"

What about it, indeed?

I saw a smiling sergeant standing by the booth, and about him were tacked several signs which read:

JOIN THE FIFTH NEW YORK VOLUNTEER CAVALRY.

EVERY VOLUNTEER GETS FULL EQUIPMENT, UNIFORM AND HORSE!

ANSWER YOUR COUNTRY'S CALL!

ADVENTURE IN THE CAVALRY, THE EYES OF THE ARMY!

The sergeant beckoned to me.

"Come along, friend. Join a fighting outfit. If you can ride a horse, this is where you belong. If you can't, we'll

teach you. We've only a few places left, so you'd better sign up now."

I looked at him, at the signs, at the officer in the new blue uniform who sat in the booth immersed in gold braid and scattered papers up to his elbows. He was explaining something with sweeping gestures to a man who was leaning over one of the papers with a pen in his hand.

There was no sense of decision in what I said, nor any weighing of possible consequences—Robert had given me the thought, and now it seemed the most natural thing I had ever done just to nod my head and step forward.

"Sure," I said. "All right, I guess it's time. What do I have to do?"

"Step right over there, soldier. The lieutenant will take care of everything."

The man who had just signed turned around as I approached the booth. I was surprised to see that it was my cousin, Joe Potter, who worked in the livery stable with his father, my uncle Jeff. Joe was about a month older than I.

"Joe! What are you doing, joining the cavalry? I should think you've had enough of horses!"

"They talked me into it, Sam," he answered laconically. "You going too?"

"Guess I am."

"The man," he nodded at the lieutenant, "said they were going to give us carbines if they could get 'em. Ever shoot a carbine, Sam?"

"No. I can learn, I suppose."

"Druther have a rifle," Joe said. "I should've joined the infantry, but I can't stand walking."

The sergeant was listening. "You sign yet?" he asked Joe.

"Sure."

"Then I'll tell you, soldier. You're going to do plenty of walking. Plenty of it!"

"You're going to have company, anyway, Joe," I said. "Here I go."

I walked up to the booth and picked up a pen.

So there was only a week before Joe Potter and I were to join the regiment at Staten Island.

That evening, waiting in the living room of the Crists' house, I tried to think of a sprightly announcement for Martha—some way to make it seem a new kind of joke that I should be a soldier.

When she came into the room, however, I took her in my arms and kissed her and buried my lips in her hair. She held me closely for a few seconds, perhaps wondering why I was silent, and then she said: "Sam, what is it? What's wrong?" I didn't answer.

She pushed me away and looked into my eyes. "Have you joined the army?"

I nodded.

"I've been expecting it," she said. Then she pulled me to her and spoke quickly, imperatively: "Let's get married right away, Sam!"

"No. Not now. We'll wait until I come home. It won't be long, dear. Then you'll have your big wedding to remember."

"I want to marry you now, darling. Tomorrow!"

It took me the rest of the evening to dissuade her; it was a difficult thing to do without once mentioning the words "death" and "widow." Before I left her, she was warm and close in my arms, sobbing and whispering: "I don't want you to go, Sam. I love you! I want you with me all the time."

That night when I came home, father suggested that the ideal farewell party for me would be a fishing trip, so the next morning we were off long before the sun rose.

The day turned warm for June. When we arrived at the stream, the sun was high above the hazy fringes of the old

mountains. The air was sweet, luxuriant with the scent of blossoms and the ancient earth.

Father and I were lying comfortably, full-length on a slab of rock, turning now and then to toast all of our bodies in the sun. Below us the creek roiled and twisted. If one watched closely he might see the sudden swerving of a shadow in the clear water as a big trout tired of one lair and sought another.

Our rods lay beside us; there were no fish in our baskets. A few crumbs from our lunch were sprinkled on the rock, and father sipped occasionally at a big mug of black coffee. I thought the trip was doing him some good–just being up there with us in that wonderful air, in that country he loved so well.

Below us, wading upstream in the hip-deep water, Davey was casting with painful concentration into the pools and eddies of the creek, unmindful of the midday sun which spelled no fishing success for anyone who was more than twelve years old and to whom an overnight camping trip in the Catskills was no longer a great adventure. He was trying with almost desperate eagerness to hook into one of the big ones which we older, wiser men had long since decided were not striking at that time of day.

"Wouldn't surprise me at all if he pulled an eighteen-incher out of there," I said.

"Hah!" Father sniffed lazily, scornfully.

"If he did, you'd be down there fast enough, yelling advice one instant and telling Davey to move over the next so you could get your line in the water."

"I'm an old man," he answered. "You'd beat me there by ten yards."

We were silent then for what seemed to be a long time. It was pleasant to lie there and forget about the life in the valley below, not to think of the trains full of young men which passed through now every day, not remember the

accounts in the newspapers which called for immediate action to save the Union—one great battle to crush the evil rebellion, not to recall that I must leave Martha and my family in a few days.

Father turned to me and spoke quietly, urgently, as if it were tomorrow or tonight that I must leave, as if he had only a few moments to tell me something which I must accept without question.

"He's a fine boy, Sam."

I nodded.

"Both of you are. And Robert, too. Three fine boys."

"Thanks, Father. We think you're quite a man, yourself."

"Joking aside, Sam. Remember how your mother told Robert to take care of all of us? He'll do that, and do it well."

"I know, Father."

"But there's more than that."

"What is it?"

"You take care of Davey, Sam. Some day he'll need you."

I sensed immediately everything he meant in those words. There had never been need for long talks between us; a few words had always sufficed to clarify our feelings on any subject. I knew it was no time for inanities about the many years my father had before him, or that Davey was resolute and would be protecting me in a few years. I touched my father's arm and gave him the answer he wanted.

"I will, Father."

We shook hands solemnly, and then relaxed again to watch Davey futilely whipping the water below.

The week that they had given me was suddenly gone; there was only one day remaining.

Martha packed a big lunch. I took two rods and we drove out to Queen's Lake, eight miles from town. It was a beautiful day. The sun was warm, the lake was calm and

blue, and the fishing was terrible. So we didn't bother to fish during most of the day. We nibbled at the lunch, drowsed in each other's arms most of the afternoon, had some more food, and then fished again for a while.

There was no urgency about that day. We didn't talk about the war, other than some cursory remarks on stories that the South might be ready to talk terms, that it would be finished in six months, that all the rebels had were generals and cotton and that the generals needed guns to win battles, while the cotton was of no worth sitting on the docks. But through all our talk was that thin thread of fear that we might be the unlucky ones, that somewhere in the Carolinas or Louisiana or Texas there was a rifle being cleaned and fondled at that very moment which would pick me from all those tens of thousands, or that one day in that coming summer one of those rebel generals might direct the artillery fire which would bring all this to an end and leave only one of us to cherish a few dear months.

No one bothered us all day. There were a few fishermen's boats at the other end of the lake a half-mile away, and several buggies went by on the road which wound beside the lake. We were out on a little point screened from the road by a grove of hemlocks, dotted here and there with slender white birches. Near the trees the point was high above the lake, and its slope down to the water was thickly covered with soft green grass.

Dusk came. We didn't want to leave. It would be over when we left. Clouds were building above the mountains and the growing darkness became oppressive. We could see lights in farmhouses far across the lake. The water was cool and inviting. When I finally spoke to her after a long silence, the words were hesitant.

"Can you swim, darling?"

"Yes, Sam."

"Let's swim now," I said, again whispering the words.

"All right, dear."

. . . so in the dusk we swam in the cool water far out into the lake. I could see the graceful sweep of her arms as she swam easily ahead of me, and her long black hair floating on the surface when she rested . . . then I went ashore and I saw her slim white body climbing toward me over the rocks which lined the water's edge. I took her hand and led her into the dark shadows of the pine trees, where the long grass was green and soft. She came into my arms then. . . . Overhead the pine needles rustled as the breeze became stronger . . . there was a distant roll of thunder in the Catskills, an instant's slash of far faint lightning, the harsh sibilance of the rising wind swaying the cattails along the shore. . . .

She was crying now, but her lips touched my neck and shoulder, and then sought my mouth. . . .

"Oh, Sam, dearest! I am not ashamed and I will never be afraid. . . ."

The peepers in the lowland ceased their song as the booming of the thunder rolled again from the mountains, and the land was still, awaiting the thrusting sweep of the rain.

8.

It was scarcely five minutes since Miss Bookstaver had wished me good night and had gone upstairs. I could hear her moving about in the bedroom directly over the library. I drained the rest of the applejack in my glass. Rising from my chair, I covered the fire in the fireplace and screened it.

With the Irving volume under my arm and carrying the oil lamp, I started up the stairs to Davey's room, opposite mine at the far end of the hall from the big room which had been my parents', and which I supposed Robert and Martha were now occupying.

Davey lay in the huge bed, his thin body scarcely disturbing the smooth layer of blankets. His face was turned away from me. He twisted restlessly in his sleep. The storm had slackened somewhat outside, but still the window frames rattled and the snow hissed against the glass.

Now, as I looked down at Davey sleeping, I knew I was going to keep my promise to my father. Robert was married now and could no longer be expected to carry on his responsibility for David.

I put the book on the table beside his bed as a token that I had been there, and, without disturbing him, I turned and went to my room.

I tossed and turned in my bed for a long hour before I slept, and during those minutes following the sudden starts from sleep–after I had realized that it had not been the long cold tail of an Andersonville rat which had touched my face, but only the silk-edged comforter; that it had not been

the splintering coughing moan of another man dying only ten feet away, but the rattle of the shutter in the wind–I had thought of Martha.

I lay there listening to the wind prying at the shutters and the window frames, conscious every moment now that she and Robert were in the same bed just down the hall. I drew a list of the reasons why it did not, could not matter, marshaling the reasons and reviewing them, placing the best reasons in the first rank, and relegating the others to rear ranks as their importance merited. It was necessary that my collection be neat and orderly, so that once arranged, I might study it.

"She is Robert's wife, my brother's wife. . . ."

"I've been gone for most of four years. She stopped loving me long ago. . . ."

"You cannot expect a woman to remain faithful to a dead man. She thought I was dead. . . ."

"I don't need a woman any more. Not one particular woman. . . ."

"She loves Robert. She always has. . . ."

"She never loved me at all. She wanted a Bellnap and his money, his position, in the first place. Samuel or Robert, it didn't matter. . . ."

However I tried to keep my mental arrangement intact, other thoughts insisted on breaking it up. I remembered the day at Queen's Lake, the evening which followed–I recalled how she had held me later, at once sobbing and smiling, how we had promised that nothing would ever erase that time from our memories.

I felt a fierce bitter satisfaction that despite Robert's victory now, I had defeated him long before he had ever thought that Martha might be his.

For a while that night I planned to have Robert see us reveal to him that old relationship. I wanted to hurt him the way I'd been hurt when he told me he had taken her

from me. I wanted him to feel the way I had when she had come in out of the storm. I formed in my mind the words which would tell him about that night before I went away to the war—cold cruel words which would slash his happiness. Yet I knew that I would never say them, that none of this was his fault, any more than it was his fault that the War Department had said that I was dead. There was only one resolution to make. I must go away and let them have their happiness.

9.

The morning was clear and cold; a thirty-mile wind was sweeping down from the Catskills. It caught the powdery snow and swirled it in frantic little clouds which scurried up the side of a drift and vanished. From the window of my room the ground below seemed to shift constantly in the sweep of the wind, as if a giant beneath the snow were flexing his muscles.

The room was cold. We had no heat upstairs other than fireplaces in each of the bedrooms. The one in the north wall of my room, from the look of it, had not been used since I left home in 1861. On my washstand were a big bowl and a pitcher from which steam twisted in the chill air. Someone—probably Martha—had left it while I slept. I hoped that she had not stood there looking down at me. I knew that in my sleep I twisted and shivered and groaned even now, more than a month since I had started to sleep as a free man once more.

I turned away from the window with a grimace, dreading the prospect of shaving, and yet thankful that it would delay for a few minutes the moment when I would have to go downstairs. After a little search I found a case of razors. Stripping to the waist, I began to soap my face.

In the mirror before me, I saw a face recognizable as my own and yet strangely different—the flesh still drawn tight by starvation, burned darkly by the wind and sun, tiny lines in the corners of the eyes, black hair brushed back and worn longer than prewar. I clenched my jaws and pulled back my lips. Teeth still good, thank God! I was

a rare specimen, to have come out of Andersonville with all my teeth! Once more I looked at the face in the mirror. Five years younger than Robert, I mused, and I look like his elder brother.

Beyond my shoulder as I lathered, I could see all of this well-remembered room, and yet even the bright light of morning made it appear a strange place, not the room to which I had dreamed of returning for so many long months. It seemed to me that I had become lost somewhere, that I had never come home, that I would awake in the Annapolis hospital and the doctor would say: "You've been delirious, soldier, out of your mind for a week."

And yet it was real enough. My books were there, and my pictures, and my clothing was hanging in the closet, and through the window I could see the snow-covered river and the white hills on the far shore.

Of course, I told myself, they thought I was dead. It is all explained by that. If a man is dead, that's the end of him. I cannot blame either of them, accuse them of anything. Not even when I remember that evening before I left. She said she'd wait five, ten, twenty years. Yes, but then we thought it would be six months at most.

He is handsome, young, wealthy. Why shouldn't she have married him? How many times did she describe the man she wanted to marry? She always said I fit the description exactly, and I would disagree. I used to tell her it was Robert, just to tease her. "Robert is the man you want," I'd say. She would laugh and say maybe she'd change her mind.

You've been licked, Sam. Pull in your pickets and withdraw from the field.

That's it, I reflected as I looked out the window once again, seeing a train sluggishly puffing along on the far shore of the river. I cannot stay here. I'll take Davey with me and we'll go somewhere–it doesn't matter where–far

enough so that no one but Davey will ever mention Highland Landing to me again. A lawyer can make a living anywhere. In a couple of years Davey can come East to school. Just because the Bellnaps have lived here for a hundred and fifty-odd years is no reason why we must stay.

I was quite pleased with this rational lecture to myself. I smoothed my uniform and prepared to go downstairs. I had intended to remove the uniform as soon as I reached home, but I hadn't yet had time to bring out my civilian clothes–it seemed hard to believe that they'd thought me dead and yet had left my room and my clothes in just the order they had been when I went away. I supposed Mrs. Malloy had packed my suits away in wrappings of newspaper to keep out the moths.

When I went downstairs, Robert and Ann Bookstaver sat in the dining room, each eating a large bowl of oatmeal. I could hear Martha moving about in the kitchen.

"Good morning," I said.

Robert looked up from his oatmeal.

"You rise late for a soldier, Sam," he smiled.

I waved my hand. "Soldier no longer."

"It's seven-thirty. I was afraid I would miss you," he said. "I'd like you to come down to the office as soon as you can, Sam. Maybe you can ride down with me. I'll show you around and then we can go up to talk with Uncle Jeff. You see, I'm taking the afternoon train to New York City and I won't be back for several days."

"Business?" I asked.

He nodded.

"Well!" I exclaimed. "So you've built the old harness shop–pardon me, shoe factory–up to the point where it merits trips to the city. Are you still making shoes for the army?"

"That's just it, Sam. Those fellows over in New England are still scrabbling around in Washington looking for army

contracts. But I'm trying to sell mine–ours. That's why I'm going to New York. I may go up to Boston. The war's over, Sam, or it will be in a couple of months. I'm a man who tries to look ahead."

It was amusing to me to see the pleasure which Robert took in speaking of these things. It mattered not at all to me whether we made shoes or locomotives. Miss Bookstaver seemed very interested, however.

"Mr. Bellnap, I should think you'd try to get some new contracts to keep the shop going."

He smiled widely. I thought he was going to wink at me before divulging the secret.

"There's a good profit in shoes. But there are better profits to be had if you know where to look. Tell me this, Sam. In the army, what plans did the men make for after the war?"

"Everything under the sun, Robert."

"No, no! I mean the ones without a job to go back to. The men who had no business or profession."

"Many things. A lot of them said they were going West."

"Exactly. Going West to farm! And what is it that a farmer needs from a man who used to make shoes and who also owns a tannery or two?"

"Harnesses!" Miss Bookstaver exclaimed.

He beamed at her. "That's what we made before the war."

I nodded. "I suppose every harness made since 1861 has gone to the army."

"That's it, Sam. Oh, there are dozens of factories making them under war contracts, but they haven't realized the war's over! New York–that's nothing, Sam! Last fall I went to Chicago. A wonderful city! And I came back with dozens of orders for harnesses as soon as I could make them. Orders have been coming in every day. The money's out there! Thousands of soldiers will follow the railroads

all over the West. And our harnesses will be everywhere out there for them to buy!"

"Fine, Robert! You'll be rolling in money, and everybody in town will be working for you."

His face became calm instantly, almost taciturn, and he looked down at his oatmeal. Then he spoke again.

"That's one reason why I want you to come down to the office. We can talk everything over—your future and mine and Davey's."

"Sure," I answered carelessly. "That's quite a breakfast you two have, but I hope you'll not be offended if I turn up my nose at it. I swore when I had my last of the Confederacy's bounty that I'd never again touch anything made from any kind of meal. So I think I'll have bacon and eggs."

"If there are any, Sam," he laughed. "The girl who helps Martha never remembers to replace things she's used up. And bacon is hard to get. The girl's not here yet. Martha will have to get something for you."

"Servants difficult these days?" I asked.

"Like everything else. I wish the Malloys were still here. They left, as I told you, after Father died. They have a little place out beyond Peterkin's. They'll be glad to see you."

"And I them," I answered. "Perhaps I can have some coffee? If you have any. Or do you grind your own from acorns?"

"It's not that bad," he grinned.

Martha called from the kitchen, saying that she would bring my breakfast. She came in with a tray, bringing me a cup of black coffee and several slices of toasted bread and some fruit. Silently she put them before me.

"Good morning, Martha," I said softly.

"Hello, Sam," she said. Her arm touched my shoulder and she withdrew it so quickly that she almost spilled the

coffee. I noticed how well she was suited to the role of housewife, with a big apron tied about her and her sleeves rolled above her elbows.

"I'll run up and get my coat, Martha," Miss Bookstaver said. "I'll ride in with Mr. Bellnap and do my shopping, and then I'll be back late this afternoon to get my things."

"All right, Ann," Martha answered, starting back to the kitchen.

"Where's Davey?" I asked. "Not up yet?"

"David left the house before you came down, Sam," Robert answered.

"To school so early?"

"He's working, Sam."

I was silent for a moment, puzzled. Then I thought I understood.

"Oh, he's out shoveling snow! That should shame you, Robert. You're one of the wealthiest men in this town, and your brother must shovel snow for pocket money." I smiled. "Of course, we used to do it, but I never agreed with Mother that it was good for us. I guess I was always lazy."

"He has more of a job than that, Sam. I'll tell you about it later. Are you riding into town with me?"

Instantly the gentle noises Martha was making in the kitchen seemed to clash and reverberate in the room; the sounds of crockery and silverware and a cabinet door closing were harsh, insistent.

"No," I said after a short silence. "I'll walk down and see the town in daylight."

He seemed to hesitate just a moment, and then he said: "All right. Make it soon, Sam. I'll have a lot to do today." He left the room while he was still speaking, going into the kitchen. I heard him kiss her, murmur a few words, and then his voice rose in the hallway: "Coming, Miss Bookstaver?"

"Coming," she answered. I heard her descending the stairs.

The front door closed heavily. There was no sound from the kitchen.

I went to the doorway. She was standing at the stove, the pan of oatmeal in her hand.

"Mrs. Bellnap," I said softly.

She turned. Her face was twisted now for an instant, as if she were about to weep.

She put the pan down and stepped toward me, her hands rubbing her thighs as if she were trying to erase some stain from them before touching me. She stood before me. I felt the muscles in my throat tightening, a bursting spreading knot of pain which brought moisture to my eyes.

"Sam! I thought you were dead! You were dead and now you're alive!" Several times she whispered, "I thought you were dead!" The words caught somewhere inside her and she was weeping.

"You know I could not have, Sam, if I thought—I would never—"

She came into my arms and I held her, whispering words which meant nothing, had no reality. All resolve to accept my defeat was gone in an instant; we were the only people in the world; her warm slim body was pressed against me and I kissed her lips and face and hair and I felt the hot tears on her cheeks. For a long time there was no sound but the murmuring hiss of burning coals in the stove and the rise and fall of her sobbing.

10.

Gradually her weeping ended. Her body relaxed against mine and she made no move to break away. I held her silently while my mind kept insisting: Don't let her go! Hold her closely! There will be no marriage, no four years lost—just a little while and it will be as it was before.

Yet I could hear another voice, a quite familiar voice which was calm, quiet, authoritative: somehow it seemed to be my mother speaking to me. It had always been with me, but more often in the past year, in Andersonville, in Savannah, in Millen. It had spoken to me when another prisoner left his meagre corn ration unguarded, when there was a rag of blanket which might be stolen, a Bible fallen from the hand of a dying man (precious printed matter which might be had for the taking), or when a weaker man than myself was caught in some petty theft and was cringing before the expected beating. I might have called the voice conscience or perhaps something else—heart, intellect, integrity, honesty, folly, cowardice—any of those names at various times. What I called it was unimportant. I had learned to obey it. Now it said simply: she is your brother's wife.

So I pushed her gently away, putting my hand under her chin and lifting her face toward mine. The taut flesh was colored with emotion. There were tears in the corners of the gray eyes which were now shadowed, opaque. While I was holding her, her hair ribbon had loosened, and now I brushed the thick black hair away from her brow.

"Sam! What are we going to do? What will we do now?"

"I don't know, Martha. I'll think of something, some way to make everything all right." I knew that whatever I said would make no difference. The hopelessness must have been apparent in my voice.

"Listen to me, Sam! Robert will understand. We'll tell him. He knows how much we love each other. He must know! We'll get a divorce. He'll do that for me!"

"No divorce. He told me last night. Besides, it would shame him. You know Highland Landing, Martha. People would whisper about him until the day he died."

"You and I can go away together, Sam. Then the shame will be on us. They'll all sympathize with Robert."

"Robert accept sympathy?" I shook my head. "Think a moment, Martha. You're his wife. There's nothing can change that. Running away would make no difference, no matter if we went to the other side of the world."

She began to cry again, hiding her face from me. I heard her words faintly: "Oh, my dear, why did they say you were dead?"

"Why did you marry him?" I wanted to say more; I almost asked if ten months had exhausted all her tears for me.

"Why did I marry him?" she said softly, almost in wonder. "I suppose it was because he loved me, Sam. For a long time I knew that. He used to visit Father on political business. I was pleased to see him. I knew he came to see me as well as Father. Don't blame me for that, because it affected only my vanity. Every day for me was just twenty-four hours closer to the time when you would be coming home. Then that night he came and told us you were dead. I wanted to die, too."

She turned away from me and walked to the stove.

"I didn't care about anything after that, Sam. For weeks it was like a dreadful dream. Everything I did, everywhere I turned, reminded me of you. I left the school; Mr. Winkle

tried to keep me there, but it was all wrong. Before that, I used to think of all those children as if they might be ours, Sam, yours and mine. I couldn't do that any longer. So I just stayed home, doing nothing. Father and Mother were very kind. They seldom mentioned it after the first night. When they did, they told me they were sure you would be found in a hospital somewhere. There were many stories about such cases in the newspapers. Then time went by, weeks and months. We decided there was no hope."

Ten months, I thought. How long they had been in rebel prisons! How short in Highland Landing!

She picked up the coffee pot and walked toward the cupboard. "Go into the dining room, darling—" her words stopped there and she glanced quickly at me. "I'll bring you another cup of coffee and tell you the rest of it."

She poured the coffee into one of the big cups which father had always favored. Then she sat beside me.

"That night, before he told us, I thought there was something wrong—at first I thought it was your father. Then I knew that it wasn't. I knew what he was going to say, and I wanted to scream that it wasn't so. I prayed that he wouldn't say the words. As long as he was silent, then I could believe that you were still alive. I told myself, just before Robert spoke, that you weren't dead at all, it was something else. I almost shouted at him to say that you were blind—that's the first thing I thought of, Sam, that you were blind and I could care for you—how I prayed in those few seconds that you were blind.

"After that evening, Robert came more frequently. I didn't pay much attention—I supposed it was politics, because it was election year. Everybody was talking about the Republicans being sure of winning again. I didn't care. It was weeks before I realized how often he was there, and why he was coming. Then my father and mother started. They would mention in the same breath that he was a Bell-

nap and a bachelor. Soon I was hearing it morning, noon, and night. Oh, they were kind enough, Sam! I'm not blaming them. All I can say is that I didn't care what happened. Nothing mattered at all. I used to talk to you, darling, in the nights. I'd lie in my bed and whisper to you. I could hear you answer. Did you think of me often?"

"Every night," I answered. It was a half-truth at best, but how could I make her understand what it was to be perpetually hungry, to think of nothing but food day after day, week after week.

"You and I talked about Robert during those nights." She looked up at me with an accusing smile which twisted her lip for an instant, then was gone. "It's your fault, Sam. I told you a thousand times in the darkness that I wasn't going to marry anyone, and then you'd laugh and say: 'Maybe you'll fall in love with him when that moustache is full-grown.'

"In the summer, Sam, he took me riding in a carriage—once we went to Queen's Lake."

Her fingers touched my hand gently.

"Everyone—my family, my friends—told me what a fine man Robert was, how important to this town he had become, how lucky I was to be courted by him."

I nodded.

"He asked me to marry him several times. I didn't have to answer him. He knew what I would say. Then the summer was over. Somehow I couldn't talk to you anymore in the nights—I guess it was then I realized finally that you were dead and would never come back. Before that I could never quite believe it. At Christmastime he asked me again. I said I would. Two months ago today we were married."

I sat there silently. I cradled my coffee cup in both hands and sipped slowly. Ten months isn't a very long time, I thought. Not very long.

"He told me you love him," I said.

"No, Sam! I might have grown to love him in time."

"Don't say that just for my benefit. He said you love him. Haven't you ever told him?"

Her voice was low. "Yes, I have. To please him. To make him happy."

I swirled the coffee in the cup and watched a few tiny bubbles circle the surface.

"Sam, I won't stay married to him now. Tell me what we should do."

There was no doubt in my mind about what I should say, but I didn't speak. It wasn't what I wanted to say, because now I was remembering the days in Andersonville when I had to fight that desperate battle to survive just to come home.

"You love me, Sam. Tell me you love me!"

Now all the bitterness came instantly to the surface and I lashed savagely with the anger I no longer could control.

"Love you! What do you think I am? You're my brother's wife! You can have only one of us. I'll tell you what we're going to do. You stay here with your husband. He'll make you happy—he has the money, the position, a beautiful home. I'm leaving. You'll not be bothered with choosing between us."

"I'll go with you, Sam," she said quickly. "I don't blame you for your anger. You'll get over it. We can leave tomorrow—today!"

"You're staying here."

"How can I stay with him as his wife when I love you? Doesn't that mean anything to you? Doesn't it mean more than a few words said by a minister?"

I rose from the table. "Yes, it means something to me. It means that if this goes on, Robert will be the one to be hurt, and he doesn't deserve that. I'll go as quickly as I can."

"No! I want you to stay, or take me with you!"

She began to weep once more. Then she moved swiftly

to me and buried her face in the rough blue cloth of my tunic. I held my arms at my sides for a moment, but slowly lifted them and put them around her shoulders. I couldn't help myself. I kissed her as passionately as I had ever done.

"Sam," she said softly, her voice almost smothered by the cloth. "I'm glad that we—you and I—that evening at Queen's Lake so long ago. . . ."

Ten months, I thought again. That's not very long in Highland Landing.

Following that kiss, curiously, there were a few moments when we seemed to be strangers, when all the past faded and there remained only the fact that she was Robert's wife. I could almost read her thoughts as she tried to weigh her love for me against her loyalty to her husband, and I could see that loyalty won at least a temporary victory.

I finished the coffee—it was cold now and bitter-tasting—and then, to ease those strained moments, I suggested that she take me around the house and show me the changes. It was then that I realized how happy she could be with Robert, how much she would have made of the marriage if I had not come home, and how much she would do if I went away.

It was a series of small things that brought the realization. With a child's excitement in her gray eyes, she pointed out each innovation she had undertaken in the past two months —new furniture, cabinets, carpets, all the fixing and redecoration which are so important to a bride in a strange house.

"Oh, Sam," she exclaimed. "It's a wonderful big house, and I love it. I never thought when I was a girl out in Cedar Bush that there were such houses anywhere in the world."

"I like it best in the summer," I answered, "when the flowers are blooming and the elms are shading the drive."

"Yes, it's wonderful then. I'm dying to work among the flowers, and I want to plant more shrubs and hedges. We've

planned to fix up the carriage house and put a lot of fruit trees out beyond it.

"Inside the house, too, Sam. There aren't enough windows downstairs to let in the sunlight or to look out at the gardens. I don't care how much your Mr. Downing knew about architecture, there should be more windows. And next summer Robert and I are going to put them in the dining room and in the library—"

She stopped suddenly, realizing the significance of the words "next summer." I had come home so inconveniently. Five minutes before she had asked me to take her away, and now she was revealing to me all the happy plans she and Robert had made.

There was an awkward pause. Finally I tried to laugh as if I really had noticed nothing in her words. "And get rid of the cupola," I said. "If you and Robert are going to live here, it should be just the kind of house you want, and I remember that you disapproved of the cupola."

She didn't reply immediately. When she did, her voice was soft and hesitant. "If I were to tell him, Sam, he wouldn't stand in our way."

"No, we won't tell him," I said swiftly. "It's too late now. Don't you realize that? There's nothing to be done. And remember this, Martha—we don't have to tell Robert anything. He knows all about it, and he can't say a word. He'll have to let us decide. I've already told you what I'm going to do."

If she had waited just a little longer. Just two months. Yet I couldn't blame her, nor Robert, nor anyone.

Only one thing to do. Pack up and go, Sam. Don't wait.

11.

There were few people abroad that morning as I walked into town. Here and there a woman in a shawl slashed hurriedly with a broom at the drifted snow on a porch. One small boy, perhaps six years old, grotesque in wool muffler, heavy fur gloves and earmuffs, stood hip deep beside a hedge where the snow had drifted. I smiled at him as I approached.

"Hey, Mister Soldier!" he called. "Come here."

I walked over to the hedge and looked down at him.

"What is it, lad?"

One hand had been concealed behind his back. Now it came forth instantly with a huge chunk of snow which came straight at my face. I ducked and was powdered with fine snow across my cap and shoulders.

"Boom! You're dead, you rebel!"

"I'm on your side, boy," I called from a safe distance.

"You're a no-good rebel and I just shot you."

"All right." I retreated with a laugh. As I continued down the street, I glanced back to see him alternately stuffing gouts of snow into his mouth and grinning delightedly at me.

Small boys are fine, I thought. Then I tried to remember the last time I had spoken to a little boy. I recalled one with bare feet and no shirt on a farm outside Gettysburg on July 6, 1863. He'd asked me how many rebs I'd killed in the battle. He was very disappointed when I told him none that I knew of. He made me feel like a malingerer.

Walking along, I saw that this part of town hadn't changed much, but there was something vaguely unfamiliar which puzzled me for a time. I knew all these homes. I had known the people who lived in them since I was a child. They were for the most part the descendants of early settlers. They bore some of the old names: Ten Broek and Blauvelt and Bogardus and Comfort and Youngblood.

"Good honest people, Sam," Father used to say. "You can't help but like them, but sometimes they make you mad. Most of 'em don't have one fresh thought from this year to next. They've got themselves a town, and they don't want a stone of it changed."

"Do you, Father?" I asked.

"Not the same thing at all," he'd say, jumping into a ten-minute dissertation on the various mediocrities of our townspeople, words which might have lost him every paying client he had if anyone had heard him.

Their houses, too, were good honest houses, built to last two hundred years. Some of them showed the influence of Downing's innovations, and some were Dutch, and some had mansard roofs. All of them looked comfortable and lived in. Looking at them, I realized what had been puzzling me about the appearance of the street. It was the houses. All of them seemed to radiate fine living, as if it were a fresh exterior surface which had been applied with a paintbrush. Indeed, some of them were freshly painted.

Even though this was a well-to-do section of Highland Landing, before the war one might have noticed here and there a frame house which badly needed refinishing, or a brick building in need of refacing, or a sagging porch. There was little of that now. Hedges and shrubs were neatly clipped and windows shone and the occasional pedestrians I met were well and warmly dressed. A couple of shining carriages drawn by sleekly-groomed horses passed, and their drivers lifted arms in cheerful greeting.

I scowled boorishly in return. I felt foolish about it, but this new air of opulence irritated me.

An elderly man descended the steps of a handsomely painted green and cream house just ahead of me. He hurried down the walk toward a phaeton with a Negro driver. I knew the house all right, but I couldn't remember who had lived there. I gazed around to orient that house with the others on Grand Avenue. Then I realized that it belonged to Doctor Byrnes. Or had—he had probably drunk himself to death by now. As I approached, however, I was quite surprised to see that the elderly man in the long sealskin coat with cap to match was the doctor. He stopped on the sidewalk and peered nearsightedly at me until I was a few steps away. A big cigar jutted above his carefully trimmed white beard. This was certainly not the Doc Byrnes I remembered. The one I had known had walked around in a perpetual state of near-drunkenness during the few years just before the war, always somewhat grimy, and looking more derelict than doctor. In those days his practice had been reduced to a few old friends who kept him in whiskey money. Father used to call him in for imaginary ailments quite regularly, just to give him a few dollars.

"Well, I'll be double-dipped!" he exclaimed. "Young Sam Bellnap back from the dead! They were telling me you were coming home. We mourned you a year ago, boy. I'm goddam glad to see we were wrong. Where the hell have you been, Sam? Too busy licking rebs to let anybody know you were still alive?"

"Hello, Doctor. How are you?"

"The hell with me. I'm an old man and I'll soon be dead. What happened to you, boy?"

"The Johnnies had me in a couple of their hotels."

"Prisoner, eh? You're thinned out a lot, Sam. Take a good rest and get back your weight."

"I will, Doc. You look very well."

"Working myself into the Old Town Cemetery, boy. That's a pure fact. Will Bentley, the gravedigger, looks me over every time I see him."

"You have a long time yet to worry about Will, Doc."

"Hell, I'm not worried. A man gets old, he dies. What I want to do is stay around until some of the young fellows get back to handle some of my patients. Folks at home keep getting sick, war or no war. We all have our burden to carry, as Abe Lincoln says. I do my share," he added sententiously. "What are you going to do now, Sam?"

"I don't know, Doc. Loaf and fish, maybe. Or take a trip someplace and think out a few things."

"If you're as smart as I think you are, you'll go in with that brother of yours. He's going to be a big man, Sam. Biggest man in this town. The Midas touch. And let me tell you something else about him. I suppose you're wondering how a drunken old fool like me could have lived this long? Don't deny it. Everybody wonders. Some of 'em even ask. I don't tell everybody. Your brother did it, Sam. Sent me up north of Albany in the lake country to a rest home. They straightened me out. Robert didn't tell anybody—he just sent me off and paid the bill."

He held up a skinny blue-veined hand.

"Look there, Sam. Don't have the shakes at all any more."

"I'm glad to see it, Doc."

"So am I. I'm doing some good around here. Anybody says a word against Robert Bellnap will tangle with me. He's a good man."

"One of the best," I said with a smile.

"Got a pretty wife, too. I was at the wedding. Say, Sam, didn't you used to hold her hand at church picnics?"

"Didn't do me any good, did it, Doc?" I forced a grin. "I'll see you again."

"Sure, boy," he answered as he clambered into the phaeton. "Can I give you a lift somewhere?"

"No, thanks."

"Well, have to rush now. I'm busier than a Front Street whore with two beds on a Saturday night." He cackled at his joke and waved his hand as the big black team stepped away from the curbing. "Bought them from your brother," he called. "Paid twice their worth. Sharp trader, that Robert."

I waved back and walked on.

Despite my pleasure at seeing the doctor restored to a useful life through Robert's efforts, as I continued along the street, I began to feel an unreasoning anger at them all—Doctor Byrnes and the rest of them here on Grand Avenue, and Robert as well—all who had filled their pockets through the prosperity the war had brought to the town, while their sons and the sons of millions like them had lost hope and youth and faith during four miserable years. Yes, and while the hundreds of thousands of families in the South saw everything they had go to the upkeep of an army which, no matter how valiantly it fought, was beaten before the first gun was fired. What right had these people to refurbish their homes, to buy expensive horses, to wear sealskin coats and smoke big cigars? They too should have been suffering as we had at Chancellorsville and Gettysburg. They should have spent a year with me under the cold unblinking stare of rebel rifles.

These houses seemed to breathe comfort and complacency. For a moment, I considered shattering someone's equilibrium with a snowball pitched through a living room window. And then the absurdity of the thought made me smile. I reconsidered the harshness of my judgment of them.

After all, did I expect civilians to live as an army in the field lived? Why shouldn't they accept the profits of the cumulative spending which was released by war? For all I

knew, a few luxuries might cushion the anxiety, the constant dread, as news of a big battle was tapped across the wires and the casualty lists began to be posted.

Still, I could not rid myself of my irritation as I walked farther into town. I had left the high plateau at the edge of the city where the larger residences were built, and now I was walking along the lower plateau of Liberty Street. There were more people on the sidewalks down here—shoveling snow or walking with heads bowed and collars turned up against the wind. I saw several I knew, and I derived a perverse satisfaction from the starts of surprise as they recognized me. Their little world was not as ordered and unshakeable as they thought it, when the dead could return to life. But, of course, their greetings were warm and sincere, and I admit that I was pleased to be remembered by so many.

Several times during that walk I barely escaped the discomfiting experience which happens at least once to every man who returns to his home town after a long absence: the meeting with an old acquaintance whose name cannot be remembered. Luckily I picked the "Jim" or "Bill" or "Ed" from memory just at the last moment, as I was being greeted exuberantly. Then it happened.

I can recall his features even now—every detail: curly light brown hair, blue eyes, little wrinkled scar on the bridge of his nose, perfect white teeth framed by a wide smile, his impressive height and broad shoulders. Yet I couldn't remember his name. I knew I'd gone to school with him, gone fishing and sailing with him. But he might as well have been a stranger. To this day, I still feel that warm wave of embarrassment when I think of it. I still don't know his name. I've never seen him since. He must have been on leave then; he was in uniform. An artillery sergeant.

"Sam Bellnap!" he exclaimed. "I'll be damned!"

"How are you?" I answered warmly, frantically searching my memory for the name. "It's good to see you."

"How long you home for, Sam?"

"For good. And you?" I felt like the world's prize fool standing there. I remembered a dozen adventures we had shared in boyhood—everything but his name.

"Another three days. You're lucky, Sam. How did you get out?"

"Invalided home. I was in Andersonville."

"God, I heard about that place! Bad as they say?"

"Worse."

He looked a bit puzzled, and his cordiality lessened considerably. "It's fine to see you again, Sam. Maybe we can get together with some of the boys when this thing's over."

"Sure. That would be fine. I'd like that."

"All right. See you again."

"Fine," I said lamely, making one last effort to remember. "Well, good luck."

"Thanks." He walked off.

I knew what he was thinking. That snobbish bastard! Who in hell does he think he is!

I hope never to repeat that experience.

There were others I met more gracefully. Passing a cobbler's shop just beyond the postoffice, I almost collided with a tiny woman who came bustling from the doorway toward a carriage waiting at the curb. She looked up as if she were about to berate me for being a clumsy lout, and then her face, which was thin and sharp and so like a vixen's that one almost sniffed for the acid odor of the den, fractured into a hundred little lines of amazed recognition.

"Sam, my dear Sam! Last week the word went around that you were safe and would be home. I said a prayer of thanksgiving. My dear boy, we are all so happy that you have been spared. Robert was beside himself with joy."

I bowed and murmured: "I imagine he was, Mrs. Colden."

"Stand back and let me look at you, Samuel."

I gladly moved back a pace. Mrs. Colden was one of our near neighbors, and had been a friend of my mother. She talked too much for father and me.

"Why, Samuel, you were wounded! Where was it, Sam? Where were you wounded?"

"In the leg, Mrs. Colden," I answered, and then was immediately sorry for the sarcasm, although she didn't seem to notice it.

"No. I mean which battle, Sam?"

"Just a little skirmish near Richmond."

"Oh, then you were with Sherman."

"No. Sherman has the Army of Tennessee. I was in the Army of the Potomac."

"Of course! I always get them all mixed up. Although I suppose it's little enough for those at home to keep track of the fighting. Well, Sam, I suppose you're happy to be home with Robert and his new wife and little Davey."

"It's good to be home, Mrs. Colden."

"I almost forgot! Come and greet Mr. Colden. He sits there like a bump on a log and never opens his mouth. Wentworth! Here is Sam Bellnap, home safe from the wars!"

Walking over to the carriage, I shook hands with the silent Mr. Colden, who was a tall plump man with a sunflower face. He was vice president and cashier of the People's Savings Bank of Highland Landing.

"Good to see you, son," he said hurriedly, and then withdrew from the field in favor of his wife.

"You're skinny, Sam," she said. "Didn't they feed you?"

"No, ma'am."

"The brutes. I say we should hang them all, especially that Jefferson Davis. Well, you just get Martha to feed you a lot of good solid food. She's a wonderful girl, isn't she? I think she's so much like your poor mother. The same quiet

way of getting things done, and so pretty and graceful. Robert is the ideal husband for her, too. He's a power in this town these days, isn't he, Wentworth?"

The patient Mr. Colden nodded.

"Robert is on the board at the bank now. He and Martha's father were elected together. Maybe you'll be next, Sam? To take your father's place?"

"I wouldn't make much of a banker, I'm afraid."

"You would too, Sam Bellnap!"

I shrugged and smiled.

"And you ought to be thinking of getting married, Sam. Get as fine a girl as Robert did." She paused a second or so, and I thought that perhaps she was thinking of her own eligible daughter Elvira, a somewhat larger edition of herself, who was blessed with one blue and one brown eye—a condition which made conversation with her somewhat disconcerting.

I murmured something to the effect that there wasn't much danger of my marrying anyone.

"I always thought that you would be the one Martha Crist would marry, Sam."

I knew that I must not give her an inch of suspicion to play with, or she'd soon have a mile-long tale to tell. I didn't know how long I'd stay with Robert and Martha—even if it were only a couple of days, it wouldn't do anyone any good to have stories whispered through the town. Mrs. Colden, who was really quite a pleasant woman, was, however, one of the best whisperers I had ever known.

"Not I, Mrs. Colden. Just good friends. I never stood a chance with Robert around."

"It seems to me, Sam, that I remember—"

"Come along, dear," Mr. Colden said.

"I suppose now that you're rich, Sam, you'll be setting up fancy law offices?"

"I don't really know what I'm going to do."

"Edith, come along!" Wentworth said sharply. I was surprised that he dared take such a tone with her.

"Right away, Wentworth. Your father did leave you quite a sum, didn't he, Samuel?" When she was after a bit of news, she didn't care how personal her questions became.

"Edith, get in the carriage! Sam, you drop in at the bank anytime."

"I surely will, Mr. Colden. Goodbye."

"Come to dinner one evening, Sam, and you can tell us about the war," she called as the carriage wheels turned.

I bowed, and as they drove off I could hear through the thin clear air her voice upbraiding him for rushing her away.

All the talk about Robert and Martha had brought our problem back to me. I thought about its solution as I walked along toward Front Street. I took a more direct route this morning, turning down a winding maple-lined avenue which had been named Bellnap Street in honor of old Jacob at the town centennial in 1810.

I knew what would happen if I stayed in Highland Landing. Neither of us would be content to let matters rest as they were. Every time we might be alone, it would start again, until sooner or later Robert would be hurt. I knew that I didn't have the strength to resist, and I was quite sure that she didn't either.

I reflected on my solicitude for Robert. Why not let him look out for himself? She had proposed that we run away. At first, I hadn't even wanted to consider it, but now I was of two minds. She had been the one to suggest it, and she had been mine first—she would be mine again. Robert might even understand, I thought.

But there was Davey to consider. Wherever I went, he would go too. Strangely enough, I didn't think it at all inconsistent that I should break all his ties with this life and take him into what must be another world. I had simply assumed responsibility for him now that I was home again.

Even without consciously admitting it to myself, I knew that I could not take my brother's wife and run like a criminal, bringing a boy of sixteen along. He might not now understand the meaning of the word adultery, but he would know it before long. He could go to the dictionary and find the word. He could lie awake at night in some two-room cabin and listen in the darkness and say: "That's what it is." He was old enough to know that we cheated my brother because we weren't strong enough to accept the penalty of making a mistake. Old enough for that, and still young enough to believe that if we did it, then it was all right.

No, there was only one thing to do. I could reconcile myself to a future without her and gather my things and, with Davey, leave the Hudson Valley forever.

It seemed very clear to me as I picked my way on the snow-covered flagstones down the hill. I had only to remember the vow to peace I had made in Andersonville, the recognition that a man's life can be just as good as he makes it. Martha wasn't mine any more—I would let Robert have her and happiness. I had no right to rob him of anything.

12.

The long ridge on which most of the homes of Highland Landing are built makes an irregular loop away from the river and then back to it again at the point where the river widens appreciably to form a fine natural bay.

The steep slope and flat land between the ridge and the river was the site of the original village put up by the Germans who followed my ancestor Jacob Bellnap. This is still the shopping district, as well as the natural shipping point for the river boats and the railroad. Indeed, when people in Highland Landing are going shopping, they do not say, as residents of so many American cities do, "I'm going downtown," or "I'm going downstreet." They say instead, "I'm going down to the Landing."

Most of the business district is contained in the two- and three-story office buildings which are graduated up the First, Second, and Third Street Hills. Stores and more office buildings line Hudson Street, running parallel to the river, and then, between the railroad and the river, is Front Street.

The railroad station is on Front Street, as are most of the warehouses, the ferry slip, and a good part of the town's industry. When I went away to war, there had been a foundry, a small shipyard, a tannery, a carriage factory, and of course the Bellnap harness works to which father had paid so little attention.

When I left Hudson Street and turned into Front Street, I halted my steps and gazed in wonder at the change. The night before, on my way from the train, the storm had

joined with the darkness to prevent my seeing the innovations.

There were new buildings crowded into almost every available square foot of waterfront. The ferry building and slip, which had once been flanked by graveled drives and two small parks with benches, now seemed almost shouldered out into the river by a gray frame building on which was neatly lettered J. TEAL & SON, IRON & CAR WORKS, and by a long low building painted an awe-inspiring red, which proclaimed to the stranger in huge black letters that it belonged to someone named Flanagan who was in the drayage business. Teal I remembered as a blacksmith who looked like a blacksmith and whose son, about my age, looked like one also. Flanagan, I had never heard of before.

There were other unfamiliar names on the new buildings which lined the street. The old places were still there, some of them expanded and all of them appearing busy, but they seemed somehow forlorn, uncomfortable, in this new atmosphere. Everywhere there were strange noises of industrial activity, quick peremptory shouts echoed from the surrounding walls, the rumbling of wheels and the clopping of hooves, the rhythmic click-click-thud of a sledge, the unnerving whine of an abrasive wheel.

The cobblestones of Front Street were crowded with wagons of all sizes, a few of them bright red and lettered along the sides with the startling legend: "Here's Flanagan Again." The few pedestrians other than myself wisely hugged the buildings in places where there was no board or flagstone walk. I was so amazed by the sight, sound, and even smell of this new physiognomy of Highland Landing that I was almost run down several times.

My first reaction was to wonder what had caused it all. Highland Landing had always been a quiet town with no pretensions to anything other than what it had always been —the market and shipping center for the fertile dairyland

cupped in the encircling mountains. Surely the war had not changed things overnight, and yet that seemed to be the only explanation.

I was well beyond the railroad station now, and just ahead was our harness factory. Rather, what had been our harness factory. The old square wooden building was still there, but linked to it by covered boardwalks were two new frame structures of two stories each. Both the additions were twice the size of the original building. And here the activity of lower Front Street was turtle-like in comparison. At loading platforms in the rear of the buildings I could see workmen tumbling cases into several railroad boxcars which stood on the siding which cut in from the railroad. A steady stream of people darted back and forth along the passageways between the buildings. Several of Flanagan's wagons were lined up on the street side.

Men shouted and cursed, horses stamped, a yard engine was nervously snorting down by the river's edge, and through it all and above it all I heard the incessant whirring and clanking of machinery.

Well, Robert, my brother! To have done so much in so little time. No wonder, I thought, that everyone in this town is so impressed by your ability.

Yet, as I paused to survey this hurry-scurry, this commercial stampede which seemed hardly credible in Highland Landing as I had always known it, I realized that I didn't like it. I have never considered myself a lazy man, but I may be one. Freely I admit that the way I earn my living has never been, and never will be, the primary consideration of my life. According to that view of Front Street that morning, I must be wrong. Surely only a citizenry whose be-all and end-all was the making of money could have changed a quiet little city into this spectacle. At the moment it seemed to me as riotous as the Union army after first Bull Run.

When I had dreamed of home in those war years just past, it had been a dream of the peace and casual ease which had always characterized Highland Landing; it had been a picture of a long deep pool with pine-sheltered banks and the trout rising as the spring evening faded toward dusk; it had been a memory of still Sunday mornings when you *knew* it was Sunday by the very air you breathed; it had been a hope, a determination, to reject any frenzied striving toward objectives which, when reached, proved not worth the struggle.

As I gazed at our factory, I reminded myself that it was of no matter to me—this scurrying for profit—since I was leaving. Yet I wondered the whys and wherefores of it all, not only my brother's proof of enterprise just ahead, but everything around me. If it were, as I imagined it must be, a result of the war—a corollary of victory—then it could not be peculiar to Highland Landing. And I now remembered that it was not. All through that journey by train north from Annapolis I had seen the ugly gaunt frames of new factories and the lines of new boxcars on railroad sidings in the mushrooming cities of the coast.

I pictured other river towns on the Hudson, on other streams, on the natural sites all over the Union where people had clustered and built their towns. It must be the same for most of them—in them also buildings were going up (how could they construct them so quickly?) and railroads were slithering out across the land to haul the goods which were made in the buildings and men were exchanging every day more goods for money and more money for goods.

Of course, I knew what to call it. Progress. It has been the same since man first constructed shelter for himself and nourished fire to warm it. I knew as well as anyone that if men grow content with the way things are, then they are on their way to oblivion. Yet, standing there trying to trace the skeleton of my old home town amidst this modern up-

roar, I wondered what future was waiting for this kind of progress.

Of one thing I was sure. Sam Bellnap, a man who had sickened, almost died, and was not yet recovered, wanted things to be as they always had been for just a little while. I suppose I wanted to wipe four years out of my life, and I wanted everyone to help me. It was too much to ask. These people here, and those in the town above, were busy with their future. The long war was almost over, and everyone had adapted himself to the changes it had brought. It was a problem yet to be faced by the men who would soon be straggling home from the South, but most of them would accept the solution offered here; some of them would assume leadership in this new type of progress. I supposed there would be a few like myself who would come seeking the life they had known, the towns they had left, and find themselves strangers.

One thing more I wondered. Had every city and town in the Union a few men like my brother to direct this new progress? I supposed they had, and I was not certain whether that conjecture reassured or frightened me. What would happen to Highland Landing when Robert succeeded in assuming full control?

Now I dodged my way between wagons and handcarts to the platform of the first building where several of Flanagan's teamsters were unloading bundles of tanned cowhide. One of the men paused to light a stubby clay pipe, and I stepped up and asked him if he could tell me in which building Mr. Bellnap had his office.

"Dunno. Ask the boss," he answered in a thick brogue, pointing toward the end of the platform.

This must be Mr. Flanagan himself—the boss, I thought. He was a short chubby man with round red cheeks and light blue eyes which seemed to catch every movement on the platform. He wore a heavy overcoat and a ludicrously

high beaver hat. A fat stump of cigar jutted from one corner of his mouth; from the other corner came a series of staccato barks which I imagined were commands and exhortations to his men. When he paused for a breath of needed air and a swiveling glance to see if he had missed anything, I asked him where I could find Robert's office.

"Out of the army and want a job, Sergeant? Mr. Bellnap's not hiring men, but I am. Can you drive a team with that game leg?"

"I suppose I could if I had to. Which building is the office in, please?"

"Look here, Sergeant. Mr. Bellnap's a busy man. And if it's a job, I'll pay you top wages for this town. What's your name? I'll put you right on the payroll."

He took off the tall beaver and pulled from it a long grimy sheet of paper and a stubby pencil which he moistened with the tip of his tongue.

"What's the name, Sergeant?"

"Bellnap. And I'm only a private."

He started to write it. "How do you spell— Did you say Bellnap?"

"Yes. First name is Sam."

His eyes were puzzled. "You look just like—"

"We're brothers."

He was sheepish and then overcordial in a moment's time.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Bellnap. Certainly proud to meet Robert's brother. My name's Flanagan. Francis Xavier Flanagan. Call me Frank." He uncased a fat hand from an enormous mitten, and we shook hands.

"Say! I thought you were dead!" he exclaimed.

"I almost was," I answered with a smile.

"This goddam war! I'm glad they're getting ready to quit. Well, I bet you were surprised to see all this."

His arm swept in a wide circle to include the buildings and the street activity.

"Just a couple of years to build it up. Your brother's a smart man, Mr. Bellnap. One of the smartest I've ever seen."

There it is again, I thought. They should set aside a day once a year for pinning medals on Robert.

"I hope everyone who tells me that isn't telling him," I said. "Such praise from everyone I've met since I came home will do his vanity no good."

"He's built up this town to amount to something. Such a young fellow, too. Brought me and my wagons up from New York to take care of some of this business. I was just as happy to get away from there. It's dog eat dog and devil take the hindmost down there. Up here, a fellow's got a chance to be top man. We make a great team, your brother and me." His tone seemed to indicate that I wasn't to believe whatever contrary story Robert might tell me about him.

"This way, Mr. Bellnap," he said, walking toward the end of the platform and the passageway to the old harness shop. "Imagine me offering you a job! That's rich, ain't it?"

I smiled and walked behind him. We went into the building where three or four elderly men had once turned out a harness now and then, just to maintain appearances.

Now the place boiled with motion and noise. There were shoes and machinery everywhere. More than a score of men were bent over machines of whose purpose I had not the slightest notion. There were two piles of unfinished shoes beside each man. I watched one of the men for a moment. He took a shoe from one pile, the machine whirred and clanked, and then he dropped the shoe on the other pile. Then he repeated the operation with another shoe, and another. It meant nothing to me. Somewhere in the background a steam engine was rattling and coughing. Ten or twelve young boys were running about, transferring armfuls of shoes from one pile to another, sweeping by with

shoes, raw materials, cases—all of them making one single confused blob of motion.

I picked up a pair of black cavalry boots from a great pile. I examined them and turned to Flanagan.

"If the Johnnies could see these, they'd quit in despair. Most of them are barefoot by now."

"Serves 'em damn good and proper!" he exclaimed.

I glanced at his own warmly shod feet and I thought of those few slender brown columns still retreating in the South, giving up their land grudgingly, sullenly, with the last desperate bitter defiance of which they were capable, those bare bleeding feet staining the trail for Grant and Sherman.

"Sure. It does," I said, tossing the boots back on the pile. "They asked for it, didn't they?"

In one corner of the shop I saw several men who seemed to be separated from the rest. On racks before them shiny new black and tan harnesses were hanging. I thought that must be the beginning of Robert's return to the harness business.

Finally, when I had glanced through the entire shop, we reached my brother's office on the far side of the building. Flanagan opened the heavy door of the office, which had been built in a corner with the joining walls of the shop acting as two sides of the room.

As Flanagan held the door for me, I hesitated.

Whatever this may come to, I thought in that instant, I must remember that there's no blame, no fault upon anyone. Even though I might want it, there must never be any quarrel between Robert and me.

"After you, Mr. Bellnap," Flanagan said.

I entered the office and Flanagan closed the door behind us.

The noise of the shop was reduced to a constant loud hum.

Robert was working at a big desk beside the room's one window. He was running a pencil down a long line of figures. He didn't look up when we came in.

"I showed your brother to the office, Robert," Flanagan said. Robert halted his pencil, glanced up and smiled.

"Just a minute or two, Sam. Sit down someplace."

Flanagan beamed at me as if he were responsible for persuading my busy brother to see me. He pulled out a chair for me. Robert finished his column, and then spoke to a skinny young man who was working at a desk on the far side of the room.

"Simpson, perhaps you'd better check with the foreman in Building C on those shipments today."

Simpson darted out of the room as if Robert had slashed at him with a cavalry sabre. Any office Robert controlled, I thought, is bound to be efficient.

Flanagan beamed again, first at me and then at Robert.

"You've met my brother, have you, Frank?"

"Sure, we're old friends by now."

"Perhaps you can go around with us later when I show Sam the plant," Robert said. It was a suggestion, but I seemed to hear the swish of that cavalry sabre once more, and Flanagan heard it also.

"Sure, Robert. Sure thing. Glad to. Right now I've got to keep them Irishmen of mine moving. Glad to have met you," he shouted back to me through the closing door.

"Well, Sam. Now we can talk," Robert said when the door was shut. "What do you think of it?" he grinned.

"Amazing!"

"Quite a few changes, aren't there?"

"Too many, Robert. I liked it the way it was."

"Still the same Sam! The world won't wait for you. Didn't the army teach you that?"

"They tried to. I guess I didn't listen."

"All that time, Sam, and you came out a private. Where

were you when they were handing out the promotions?"

"They used to offer them to me. I liked being a private. Twice they tried to give me a commission."

"Didn't you set yourself a goal to work toward? Wasn't there anything you wanted?"

The unintended impact of his words reached both of us instantly. He stopped smiling and looked away from me. I knew he regretted saying it, but that didn't help any.

"Yes," I said. "I wanted to get out and come home."

Rising, I walked over to the window beside his desk. Farther down Front Street, almost at the edge of town, I could see the naked masts and spars of the whaling ship *Robert Bellnap.* She'd been tied up there in lonely exile since her last voyage in 1859.

I changed the subject easily. "You say the world won't wait for me. I suppose that's true, but maybe I don't want to keep up with it."

"You'll have to try, Sam."

"You're changing the town," I said, without taking my eyes from the ship. "You and a few others. I don't have to like it. The old Highland Landing was the loveliest town on the river. Now we have all these ugly buildings down here, and soon I suppose you'll be building others up on the bluff. In twenty years this will be just another smoky city. Do you expect me to approve that?"

He walked to me and put his arm around my shoulder. I wanted to shrug it off. He was finished with his elder brother role; never again would I need protection and guidance from him. Neither did I desire affection. All good intentions to the contrary, his marriage to Martha had ended that.

"Don't you suppose I love this town, too?" he asked. "Don't you think I know that it's our town—always has been and always will be? But I don't want it to be a sleepy village reminiscent of a Washington Irving story. We're

going to have enough of those along this river. I want Highland Landing to be prosperous, Sam. Building and growing until every schoolchild in the Union knows that there are three cities on the Hudson River: New York, Albany, and Highland Landing."

"Yes," I said. "A city with plenty of money, and everybody grabbing for it."

"Money makes the mare go, Sam. Do you want us to be poor when we've no reason to be? What did you expect me to do during the war? Sit by and watch everyone else pull it in? We did good work for the army, and we made fine profits. I invested that new money and reinvested it. It took a lot of hard work, Sam. I think I've got a right to be proud of that."

"Sure, Robert," I said, smiling. "Don't mind me. I'll get used to it."

"Of course you will." He returned to his desk and sat in the swivel chair again, swinging his long legs out and up on the desktop. "Now let's talk about you. What do you want to do, besides go fishing when it gets warm enough?"

"I think there's only one thing for me to do, Robert—"

"Wait. Let me talk first. I've thought about it a good deal. All this," he said, swinging his arm as if to encompass the town, "is yours and Davey's as much as it is mine. I want you to help me with it. Take up Father's practice again, handle all the legal affairs for the plant here, the ferry—we bought the ferry two years ago, Sam, you can ride without paying—and the real estate, all the rest of it. How about politics?"

"Not for me."

"Judge Crist is going to Washington next year. To Congress. He'll be the candidate, and we couldn't lose an election in this district if we tried. How about running for county attorney?"

I shook my head. "I don't want it."

"Listen to me, Sam. You can't spend all your time hunting and fishing. You have the brains for any office you want. You're my brother—that means something now, they tell me. Everyone likes you, Sam. What do you say?"

"County attorney. It sounds nice. What about Mr. Enright? What happens to him?"

"He's due to retire, Sam. Don't worry about him. He'll get angry and sulk and that will be the end of it."

"All this—it means that if I want to be a politician, I can step right along at the head of this big parade you've started here?"

"Whatever you say, Sam. I've already started Davey on the business end."

"It sounds well, Robert. But you know what my answer is."

He sighed. "I suppose I do."

"All right, then. I'll tell you what I have in mind. I'm going to leave Highland Landing—go out West somewhere, and I want to take Davey with me."

"I won't let you do that, Sam! He stays here with me."

"I'm going to take him!"

"You will not! His future is here in Highland Landing. I'm going to train him in the business. He'll become a partner. He'll have wealth, position, everything he'll ever need."

"Father left him in my care," I said angrily, almost happy at the same time that there was at last an issue about which we could quarrel.

"He's not in your care any longer, Sam. I'm his legal guardian now."

"That doesn't make any difference," I said confidently. "All I have to do is ask him. He'll go with me. And you won't stop him."

My brother dropped his feet from the desktop and rose from the chair. I could see that he was angry, but he con-

trolled his temper and kept his voice low. "I can't stop you from trying, Sam. But there's another thing you've forgotten. You and Davey have no money at all unless I give it to you!"

"What are you talking about? I helped draw up that will! I know what it says."

"You forget you died a year ago, Sam. Father made a new will, dividing the estate in half. I am to control David's money and property until he's twenty-one. There's no provision for you unless I choose to make it."

I was astounded. "You mean you'd rob us, Robert?"

"No! I mean only that I won't let Davey go with you. I know as well as you do that if you ask him, he'll want to go. But I also know that you won't take him if it's going to mean the loss to him of all the advantages he has in Highland Landing. If you persist, Sam, neither you nor he will take a penny of your money. Not a cent! I want you both to stay here. In that event you'll each have a third of the estate. If you want to go alone, I'll see that you have all the money you'll need, even though everything we have is tied up here in the business and in the real estate. I'll be glad to care for it. But if you take him—nothing! Not a cent!"

"I can take it to court, Robert!"

He leaned toward me, shaking his head slowly.

"You're a lawyer, Sam. You ought to know you couldn't win. And that's not the problem. We're faced with a decision on what is best for Davey. Is he going to share whatever wild, quixotic life you're forcing yourself into, or is he going to stay here where he belongs, where he can lead a useful life and be happy? Think about it, Sam. What did Father mean when he told you to take care of Davey, as you say? He wanted you to do what's best for him, of course. You know that means he should stay in Highland Landing."

It was an uncomfortable feeling to admit to myself that

probably he was right. I supposed the main reason I wanted to have Davey with me was because I loved him and couldn't think of separation from him. Again I walked to the window and stood gazing out at the street and the waterfront beyond.

"One thing more, Sam. I don't want to say this, but I'm afraid I must. You can't take care of him. I wonder if you can take care of yourself. The effect of that prison on you is perfectly apparent. It shows in your eyes, your voice. It almost wrecked you, Sam. I think it may be years before you fully recover." His voice became kind, almost gentle. "Stay with us, Sam. This is where Davey belongs, where you belong."

"He's coming with me, Robert," I said, turning from the window. "Where is he now? You said he was working. Why isn't he at school?"

"He's learned as much as they can teach him at the Academy. I expect he'll want to go to college in a year or so. In the meantime, he's working for me."

"Here?" I was surprised; certainly Robert hadn't put him on a machine in the factory.

"No. I had him here in the office for a while, but now he's with a crew of men cutting ice at Crystal Lake."

"Cutting ice?" I shouted. "Are you crazy, man? Do you want to kill him? No wonder he looks so thin! Doing a grown man's work!"

"Wait a minute, Sam! He's not doing any hard work. Just handling tools for the men and helping with the horses. He asked to do it, and I think it's good experience for him to be out with the men. That's what I want him to do. They like him. They won't let him do any real work. I made certain of that."

"He should be back in school!"

"He doesn't want to be, Sam. Listen to me a moment. Why don't you talk to him about all this? Promise me you

won't ask him to go away with you before he tells you his own ideas. Why don't you go out there and get him and spend the afternoon with him? See what he thinks. While I'm away, take him with you around town. Have a good time with him. He's waited long enough for you to come home. When I return from the city, we can talk it over again. All right, Sam?"

The voice within me was telling me what I should do. Sometime within the next few days, I should go down to the railroad station and buy a ticket to whatever point the railroads in the West had reached.

I picked up my gloves from the desk. Not one word in all this time had been said about Martha, and yet she was the real reason why we had been bickering, even though we wouldn't admit it. As long as I stayed in this town, there would be an insurmountable barrier between my brother and me.

"All right," I said. "I'm not going to promise anything at all, Robert. But I won't do anything about leaving until you get back. Now let's go up and talk to Uncle Jeff."

13.

The Bellnap livery stable was a long low gray building with a wide central sliding door flanked by two big windows which had been cob-webbed and fly-specked ever since I could remember. They hadn't changed any. The opaque surface of the one on the right hid the office, and behind the one on the left was the harness and saddle room. There were iron hitching rails on the curbing at each side of the driveway into the building.

Robert went directly to the office as we went in. I remained in the partially opened doorway.

"He isn't here, Sam," Robert said.

"I hear someone in the back," I answered. "I'll go get him."

As I stepped into the stable, I immediately remembered the wonderful hours without end that I had spent in this building when I was a child. The strong pleasant odors of horses and manure and leather and hay were thick and satisfying. I have seen people turn up their noses at those smells, but to me they have always been associated with the best days of my youth. I have always liked horses. When I enlisted in the army, the cavalry had been the most neglected branch of the service. Only when Jeb Stuart and Forrest and a few other rebs had shown what they could do, did the Union commanders realize that they had some fine cavalry officers themselves in Sheridan and Kilpatrick and Pleasanton and Buford. In prison in 1864, I had always been happy to hear from new prisoners that our cavalry was increasingly respected by both armies.

In the stable now there was the lingering acrid smell of singed hoof parings, and the boards of the flooring were soft and damp under my feet as they had always been, and I could hear the rustling stamping motion of horses in the stalls and the soft grinding sibilance of their jaws as they chewed.

I was only a few feet from the door when there was a harsh staccato drumming of hooves on the boards at the far end of the stable. I saw a swift movement toward me in the murkiness, and a shrill young voice shouted: "Look out, Mister! He'll trample you!"

A slim dark horse rushed at me, shied at the open door I partially blocked, and came to a quivering stop beside me. He was a chestnut colt, and even in the darkness I knew I would have liked to have had him with me in the regiment. I stepped slowly to his head and with soothing words and a few gentle pats calmed him, while I stared into the darkness, trying to see the person to whom the voice belonged.

It was a boy about twelve years old, tow-headed, with a wide buck-toothed grin. I recognized him immediately, although he'd been only a little boy the last time I had seen him. It was George Potter's son, young George.

"Some horse, ain't he, Major?"

"He sure is, son," I said. "Is that the way you greet your customers—with a runaway horse?"

"He wasn't running, Major. Just playing. He likes to do that—sort of teasing me."

"I see, George. Are you the man in charge here?"

"How'd you know my name?"

I laughed. "I know it. Is your grandfather here?"

"He's delivering a horse and buggy to a drummer at the Huguenot Hotel. He'll be right back. Wait till I put this horse up, will you?"

"Go ahead."

I stepped back to the office and told Robert that Uncle

Jeff would be back soon. He nodded absently. He was staring at the coated window as if he could see through it.

When the boy came back, I was waiting for him again on the stable floor.

"How'd you know my name?" he asked again.

"George Potter, isn't it?"

"Sure. George Potter. J.R. That stands for Junior. My father is George Potter. S.R. That stands for Senior. He's in the cavalry. You're a cavalryman, ain't you?"

"I used to be. I'm just out of the army."

"I could tell by the cap and boots. My father's in the Fifth New York. Best regiment in the army. My Uncle Joe is in the Fifth New York too. The Johnny Rebs have got them both in prison—but they'll escape. Wait and see. Grandpa says old Cump Sherman will get 'em out and send 'em home."

"That's right, George." I had to hide a smile at his casual reference to Sherman as "old Cump." I wished that some of Sherman's bummers who had been with me in prison could have heard this sprout use their favorite nickname for the general.

"What's your regiment, Major?"

"I'm no major. Just a simple private."

"Don't you think I know that?" he asked scornfully. Then he grinned. "I call 'em all Major, sometimes Colonel. It makes 'em feel good."

"And they give you an extra dime, eh?"

"Sure."

"All right," I said, fishing in my pocket for a greenback. "Here you are, George, and thanks for the promotion."

"Say! Thanks, General!"

"So you wondered how I knew your name?"

"How did you?"

"Why, I've known you since you were born. The first time you sat on a horse, I was holding you. Don't you

remember me? Last time I saw you, you were about eight years old."

He looked puzzled.

"Sam Bellnap," I prompted.

"Judas Priest! Grandpa told me you were dead!"

"I can't be dead. I'm standing here, talking. I'm no ghost."

"Sure. Ghosts don't have greenbacks in their pockets. Wait till Grandpa sees you! He's always talking about you."

"Good or bad?"

"Pretty good, mostly."

"Does he have you working for him, George?"

"Oh, I just help him out with the horses," the boy said importantly. "His regular man isn't here today, so I stayed home from school to help."

"Do you get a good wage?"

"Sure. Mr. Bellnap gives me a dollar a week. Puts it in an envelope too, just like Grandpa's money."

"Do you ever get a chance to go riding on that colt?"

"Oh, no! Grandpa would skin me alive if I did."

"Does the colt have a name?"

"Not that I know of. He's new. We only got him two weeks ago."

"What do you say we call him Fighting Joe?"

"That's a good name. Gee! What do you call him that for?"

"He snorts like General Hooker used to. We always said we could tell when a battle was coming by the way Fighting Joe Hooker was snorting. The louder the snort, the bigger the battle."

"You're fooling, ain't you?"

"All right, I'm fooling. But we'll call him Fighting Joe. I always wanted to name a horse or dog or something after that man."

"Hear that?" the boy yelled at the horse somewhere in the darkness. "You got a name. Fighting Joe!"

"Do you know my brother Davey, George?"

"Sure. He comes down here sometimes."

"Well, we'll be going riding often now, and you can go along with us on Joe Hooker."

"You mean I'm going to ride him with a saddle, Mr. Bellnap?"

"Sure you are. And call me Sam. We're cousins, you know."

"All right, Sam. But I wouldn't dare call Mr. Bellnap, your brother, anything but Mr. Bellnap. Judas Priest! Grandpa would belt me if I did!"

I smiled at the expletive. It had always been one of Uncle Jeff's favorites. With some amusement, I thought that this was the second person who wouldn't address my brother as "Robert." Perhaps that would always indicate the great difference between us. Everybody had always called me "Sam."

We stood there by the doorway for a few minutes, discussing the fine points of Fighting Joe, and life in the army, and the story of Gettysburg—or the little I had seen of it in those three mad days. Then a step sounded behind us.

"Grandpa!" the boy called. "Here's Sam Bellnap home and come to see you! He ain't dead after all!"

"Hello, Uncle Jeff," I said, putting out my hand. "It's been a long time."

"It has that, Sam," he answered, pumping my arm with both hands. "Robert told me a couple of days ago that you were safe. It's good to see you, boy."

"Thanks, Uncle Jeff. Robert's in the office now. Let's go in."

He looked the same—maybe a little older—burly, with short-clipped wiry gray hair and thick tufted eyebrows and a craggy face. His shoulders seemed to slope more than I

remembered, and there were lines around his eyes. My cousins George and Joe were always slimmer, younger editions of Uncle Jeff—with certain differences. George's features were not so firm and strong, and they had never reflected the self-reliance and authority of my Uncle Jeff. Joe, on the other hand, had lacked the good humor and friendliness of his father. He had always been inclined to surliness and an independence which had limited his friendships.

Uncle Jeff evidently guessed the reason for my visit, because his next words were: "You have some news of my boys, Sam?"

I nodded.

He spoke to his grandson: "Run along and take care of that horse you were fooling with all morning."

"Yes, Uncle Jeff," I said. "It would be a good idea to send him off somewhere."

He gazed at me steadily for a second or two. I wished with all my being that something would happen suddenly to prevent my telling the story I had brought home with me.

"Look out that colt doesn't kick you while you're combing him," my uncle said to the boy.

"Sure," George answered. "Don't you forget that ride, Sam."

I waved in agreement, and he skipped toward the rear of the stable.

Uncle Jeff and Robert exchanged brief greetings, and then my uncle motioned to the big swivel chair with the same leather cushion that had been there for twenty years, but I swung up on the flat desk and sat facing the chair. Robert sat in a straight chair by the window. Uncle Jeff sat down and looked at me.

"So it's bad news you've brought, Sam?"

"Bad news," I nodded. "I came down as soon as I could. I just got home last night."

"George? or Joe?" he asked softly, and then added after a short pause: "Or both?"

"George. He's dead."

He expelled his breath, sighing softly, a long sigh. His head was bowed and his fingers played at the frayed wrists of his sweater sleeves. I waited for him to speak. Robert rose and walked to him, putting both hands on Uncle Jeff's shoulders.

"In the prison, Sam? Were you in the prison with him?"

"Yes, Uncle Jeff."

"When was it, Sam? Why didn't they let me know?"

"It was last July. The eleventh of July. I knew they hadn't sent the word through. Sometimes they did—in George's case they probably didn't bother. Maybe it's best that they didn't. You should know everything about it."

"So long ago," he said in a weary tone. "And Margaret and young George were expecting him soon now."

"There was no paper or ink to write letters with, Uncle Jeff. We had no money to bribe the guards."

"How did he die, Sam?"

I would have given anything I possessed to have avoided answering that question. How many times had I rehearsed myself for it, and how many times had I found no answer! When we reached Annapolis—the first lot of prisoners to come through in months—I knew I would have to bring this news home to my uncle. I hated the obligation to tell him. Each time I had thought of it since my release, I had tried to manufacture a new story. I wanted to lie about it, to tell him something about George's death which would remain as a proud memory.

One after another I discarded the possibilities: that George had been shot in an attempted escape; that he had been betrayed in an insurrection against the rebels and so executed; that he had died of one of the several diseases which had cut down so many prisoners; that he had crossed

the deadline and been killed by a guard. These and other lies I had wanted to tell his father.

I knew that all I could tell him was the truth. No matter how I worried the problem in my mind, each time I came back to that. He deserved no less.

Now as I looked at him sitting silently in the chair, waiting for me to speak, with his big kindly face showing great grief nakedly as he twisted the wool yarn of his sweater around his finger and then untwisted it and once more, unconsciously, twisted it back—I recalled how the wise men of this world have so often praised the virtue of truthfulness and have so logically explained that there can never be a satisfactory substitute for it. I believe that to be true. However, I wished they were there, or at least a good parcel of them, to counsel me at that moment.

I wanted to lie, and I would have lied. There could have been no blame in it, but for one fact which was not under my control. If I had been certain that Joe Potter was dead somewhere in the South, lying in a prison cemetery, then the truth would have been hidden forever, and better so. But Joe was probably alive and would be home soon, and my story of what had happened in Andersonville must be told before his. Not for my sake certainly, but for the truth's sake. There was no other course for me but to tell my uncle how George had died. That was why I had come down to see him, and now I must begin.

"Well, Sam?"

"Forgive me, Uncle Jeff. It's very difficult. I'm trying to find the right place to start."

"I feel so badly about this," Robert said. "I was the one who sent him to the war."

"No, no!" my uncle exclaimed. "He was going anyway. If he hadn't taken your bounty, Robert, it would have been someone's. It wasn't your fault."

"I wish I had gone myself."

"Tell us the story, Sam," Uncle Jeff said. "All of it. Don't hold any back."

"I wasn't going to tell you any of it, Uncle Jeff. I thought I could give you a plausible story to ease the impact of George's death, but I can't. I've thought it over time and again, and I always come back to the same answer."

"That's right, Sam. You saw his boy. He's growing up now, and he's very proud of his father. You've got to tell me what happened so that I'll know what to tell him and his mother. If I can't tell them the story you're going to give me, then I'll have to invent another. You can help me. So I've got a right to know all about it."

"Yes," I answered with reluctance. "I'll tell you some of the things about Andersonville along with it, so you can understand why a man could do things because of hunger, fear, even insanity—"

I gripped my knee in my linked fingers and leaned back on the desk as I spoke. Soon the words came more easily, and then the entire year came sliding back to me and it was there with us in that room. I remember thinking as I spoke to them, that all my life I would be telling this—if I never said another word of it aloud, I would be telling it to myself forever in my mind. Every moment was there in bitter clarity, although my voice was giving them only the outline.

14.

"We were all captured together. March 2, last year. It was a cold wet morning. You know the kind I mean—when the clouds slide along in the wind and it rains a little, stops, and then starts again. We were outside Richmond in a little town—a few houses and a railroad—"

I never did learn the name of that town. Nobody bothered to ask. It was just a place to stop after three days of riding, three days of burning buildings and ripping up railroad tracks.

Rain, rain, rain. Mud and cold wet clothes. No fires to cook with. Only the poor shelter of some pines under which to spread our wet blankets. Somebody slouching by in the darkness said that we had grabbed the best bivouac. If that were so, I pitied the other five regiments. Why hadn't we slept in those barns and warehouses before burning them?

Bill Andrews and I huddled into our blankets under the branches of a huge pine. The rain dripped through steadily.

Just as I was finally edging into sleep, I heard a calm voice on the other side of the tree: "Wonder what son of a bitch picked this place? Can't see a goddam thing with these trees. Anybody was to ask me, I'd say this was just about the best place in Virginia for that bastard Stuart to jump us Maybe Kilpatrick thinks Stuart's at some big society dance over there in Richmond. Ask me, I say he's laying up the road there, waiting till we get nice and cozy in these warm

dry blankets." He was silent a moment. Then he said, "Goddam the rain."

My cousin George's voice came in a loud self-assured taunt: "Old Jeb got you worried, boy?"

The calm voice again, without a change of inflection: "Goddam right. First time I ever hear tell of Jeb Stuart, I got worried. He's a mean son of a bitch. Seems to me every time I turn around in this here war, there's Jeb Stuart hootin' and hollerin'. I can't take to a man like that, always wantin' to fight."

"Hell, soldier," George laughed. "We licked Jeb Stuart before."

That was only partly true. The regiment had made Stuart run a few times, but George had never been in any of our actions.

"Sure, we did," said the calm-voiced one. "Least, they said we did. I never followed him up to make sure he was licked. Seems to me we'd lick him, and next day, there he is again. Never has the sense to know enough to stay licked. A real stupid man in some ways."

I heard Joe Potter's voice, irritably speaking to his brother: "Quit the talking and get to sleep. Like the Bible says, there's a time for everything under the sun, and this ain't the time for shooting your mouth off. There'll be lots of talking when we get back from this goddam ride."

"Good night, boys," the man with the calm voice said. "Don't forget your prayers. And say, friend, if Jeb happens along, why, you just cut that plume offen his hat and take it up to Washington. They'll give you a month's furlough."

George hadn't been with us very long. He was always saying how much he ached for some real fighting.

He got it. Just before dawn a couple of artillery pieces opened on us. Somewhere beyond the pines a bugle began to blare. Horses were milling and rearing; no one could find his own. I caught one I'd never seen before. While I was

trying to mount him, the rebs came crashing through the trees. Even before the echoes of their field pieces had died away, they were on us.

They cut right through, slashing and screaming that crazy yell of theirs. They re-formed and jumped us again before we were mounted. Bill Andrews spurred beside me when I finally climbed into the saddle. We looked about for the line of battle. Men shouted, cursed, screamed, and horses plunged wildly in the darkness. From the pines an officer shouted: "Stand and fight, you sons of bitches! Come back, you cowards!" In a moment I heard him again, his voice now begging: "Don't run, men! They'll cut you down!"

Out of the trees nearby I saw a trooper riding as fast as he could go, bent low over the horse's neck, and another trooper behind him. Through the whooping of the rebs and the sharp slapping sound of our Spencer carbines, I heard Joe Potter's angry shout: "George, you damn fool! Come back!"

George was headed for the open land near the railroad. I spurred after him, and I could hear Bill Andrews yelping behind me.

"Where's he going, Sam? Back to get help?"

We were in the open now, gaining on Joe Potter. George was rapidly pulling away. Through the misty red glare of the still burning buildings and the faint glimmerings of dawn, I saw his arm rising and falling as he slapped at the horse with the flat of his sabre.

"Let him go, Sam!" Bill yelled. "We'll be cut off!"

I don't know why I kept on. Certainly it wasn't because of any great concern for my cousin's safety. Perhaps that was the one clear objective in all the confusion—to stop him from running away.

Then, with that ear-splitting yell of theirs, a troop of Stuart's horsemen swerved around a burning shed and we

were in their midst. I tried to cut my way out, but a savage slash from a grinning brown-bearded giant who might have been Jeb himself caught my sabre and tossed it high in the air. Another slash ripped my leg from knee to hip. The blood gushed out. I thought I would bleed to death right there. I tried to grab the lips of the wound and pull it together. Then I fell from my horse and lay on the ground, thinking that I was going to die.

"Give up, Yanks," Brown-beard bellowed.

"Sure, Johnny," Bill Andrews said. "Whatever you say. I quit this war a minute ago."

Several more rebels rode up, escorting my cousins.

"What the hell, Sam," Bill Andrews said when they let him dismount to help me. "It's easy to get into Richmond, if you work it right."

"They put us in Libby Prison," I told my brother and my uncle. "We thought we were lucky. We'd heard about Belle Isle. And then they sent us over there. Prisoners were dying by the hundreds. But we didn't stay long. One day they herded us out again and put us on freight trains. We thought it was exchange."

Six hundred men in ten boxcars. For five days and five nights we bumped southward. We had no idea where we were going—the more sanguine declared it was Savannah, where an exchange ship would be lying outside the harbor waiting. That rumor spread like a grassfire in August. One man in our boxcar claimed the guards had told him there were two ships awaiting us in Savannah. Those nearest the car doors yelled eagerly at children as we passed through cities: "Hey, Johnny, what town is this?" Sometimes the only sign that we had spoken was an open-mouthed stare, or, from the guard: "Shut your damn yapping, Yank," but often the shouted answer would rise to us above the shriek-

ing of the ungreased wheels, and then there would be a clamor among us to know where Raleigh was, or Charlotte, or Columbia, or Augusta.

I didn't care much about it. I was sure I was going to die. They sent a doctor in to see me at one town. He was a foul-mouthed old man who poked and probed with evident pleasure at my pain, repeating again and again: "Leg's got to come off, Yank. It's bound to hurt some." Then he would laugh. Bill Andrews finally put him out of the boxcar. Even the guards couldn't get him back past the door to get at my leg.

"I'll die with two legs," I told Bill. He did the best he could for me, boiling water over small fires he built in a mess kettle and bathing my leg several times a day. He ripped up his underclothing for bandages. His care undoubtedly saved my life.

Late on the fifth day we passed through the town of Macon, and turned upon a railroad which led almost due south. About midnight the train stopped. We stumbled off. We were in the midst of a forest of tall pines. There were a few houses nearby.

Stretching out into the darkness was a double row of great heaps of burning pine, smoking and flaming fiercely, and lighting up a little space in the surrounding forest. Between the two rows was a narrow road, down which we were ordered to walk. Six hundred tired, hungry men moved along slowly through double lines of guards. We marched in a column of fours, silent for the most part, although there was an occasional groan or curse.

The only voice I remember hearing was lifted half in anger, half in a wry kind of laughter: "Where's that Savannah bastard? Where the hell's that pier where we board the ship?"

A quarter-mile from the railroad we came to a massive palisade of great squared logs standing upright in the

ground. The fires blazed up and showed us a section of these, and two massive wooden gates, with heavy iron hinges and bolts. They swung open as we stood there and we passed through into the space beyond.

A few ragged figures were grouped around fires near the gates, watching us as we tried to peer into the darkness.

Bill Andrews called to one of them: "Hey, soldier! What's the name of this place?"

"Camp Sumter, Georgia," the answer came. "They call it Andersonville."

"After we arrived I didn't see anything of George and Joe for a long time. A couple of months, anyway. There were thousands of us in there. We stayed pretty much in our own areas. In May, I found them. We wanted them to join an escape attempt with us."

The pen was a long rectangle, divided in the center by a creek about a yard wide and ten inches deep. On each side of this was a bog of slimy ooze one hundred and fifty feet wide, so yielding that it was impossible to walk upon it. From this swamp, sandhills sloped north and south to the stockade. All the trees within the sixteen acres of the pen had been cut down. There was no shelter of any kind provided for us. We had to make our own homes. A lucky few had blankets or pieces of tattered canvas to make tents. The rest used roots and swamp withes to weave frameworks for little dugouts which were covered with the few pine branches still strewn about the ground or with the stems and leaves of the sparse vegetation. Just beyond the stockade was a vast forest of tall pines which we couldn't touch.

The scurvy and the dysentery and the filthy water killed men by the score every day I was in that place. Thirteen thousand dead from a total of forty thousand. Any man would be insane after a month in Andersonville if he

didn't think he was going to be exchanged or was going to escape. Like thousands of others, Bill Andrews and I planned an escape.

Three troopers of the First Vermont Cavalry were with us, and I volunteered to get the Potters to help dig the tunnel. It took me a full day of wandering around the stockade to find them. They were living with a group of New York City men, an unsavory bunch for the most part, most of them bounty-jumpers who had enlisted time and again for the bounties and then deserted, until finally they were faced with the choice of fighting or surrendering. I wasn't surprised to find George and Joe with them. Several years before the war, they had gone to New York and worked as stevedores, and they probably knew some of these men.

George was quite eager to try the escape; Joe was scornful.

"You'll dig the goddam hole, and if it doesn't cave in on you, when you get outside you'll run ten feet and get shot. The hell with it!"

"Come on," George told him. "Maybe getting shot is better than starving to death."

I thought I knew how to handle Joe. "If you're afraid to try, Joe, we can get somebody else."

He picked up his blanket and utensils, giving me an angry stare. "You know damn well, Sam, that I've never been afraid of anything. Let's go dig your rathole."

"What'll we do when we get out, Sam?" George asked me while we were discussing the digging.

"Run like hell," Bill Andrews said. "If the dogs don't get you in the first twenty miles, then head for Sherman. Don't let any white man see you. Go to the slave cabins for food."

"Nobody ever makes it," Joe sneered. "How many try? Somebody almost every day. They bring every one of 'em back. You can't lose those dogs."

"Sounds to me," one of the Vermonters said, "like you don't want to try, soldier."

"You can hear those dogs at night same as I can."

"Then pull foot the hell out of here," the Vermonter said. "Just keep your mouth shut about this tunnel."

"I'm with you," Joe said. "I'll go farther than you will. And keep your goddam remarks to yourself. Come on, let's start digging."

Our hut was some fifteen feet from the dead line which was about ten yards from the stockade. Anyone who crossed the dead line was shot immediately, without warning. We figured that we had forty-five feet to tunnel before we came up. We started with a hole in our hut about five feet deep. Then we sliced into the soft earth at a ninety-degree angle, headed for the stockade. We used half-canteens for tools. The tunnel was simply a round rat's burrow, a little larger than a man's body. The digger lay on his stomach, dug ahead of him, threw the dirt under him, and worked it back with his feet until the man behind him could scoop it up and work it back to the next. Breeches with the bottoms tied provided bags for carrying the dirt to the swamp. It was damned hard work in the tunnel, and the digger had to be relieved every half-hour. It was hard on a man's nerves as well, to lie in that hole waiting for a cave-in. I had to force myself to crawl in there sometimes, and often we had to spend minutes convincing George and one of the Vermonters to continue.

"How'll we get out if it caves in?" George asked.

"We won't, you dumb bastard," his brother answered. "Come on, let's dig."

We worked nights for a week. After the digger's heels had vanished into the tunnel on the first night, every hour or so someone would whisper: "I wonder how far in he is." He would crawl into the hole until his head touched the

digger's bare feet, and then his muffled voice would come back to us: "Are my feet still showing?"

For a disappointingly long time they were, but soon his feet disappeared also, and then another man crawled in to see how far he could get, until, by the fourth night, we were all in the tunnel passing dirt back, believing that we were just below the stockade. The aggregate length of our bodies was about forty feet, so we knew it couldn't be far. We worked two more nights and still hadn't run into the logs of the stockade, which other tunnelers had found were sunk five feet deep. On the seventh day, however, a man in a hut some yards to the left of ours sunk into a hole up to his waist. It was our tunnel! We hadn't known that a man digging a tunnel with his right hand will veer to the left. We hadn't even approached the stockade. Had we kept digging, we probably would have broken through into our own tunnel.

We had plenty of time. We wanted to start again immediately, this time digging with both hands, and using sticks from our hut tied together to guide our burrow in a straight line.

"Not me," George Potter said. "No more. That thing is going to cave in. And I been listening to those dogs. If you do get out, they'll tear you to pieces."

"I told you when we started!" Joe exclaimed. "I knew it wouldn't work. Nobody gets away from this place."

"I guess we'll quit, Sam," George told me. "No hard feelings?"

"None at all, George. I wish you'd stay."

"No more, Sam. Good luck."

So they went back to live among their friends the bounty-jumpers, who were now beginning to live in open luxury, so to speak, with the spoils of nightly raids upon the rest of the camp. The Vermonters and Bill were glad enough to see the Potters leave. George had shirked his

share of the digging because of his fear of being buried, and Joe was surly all the time, although most of his animosity seemed directed toward me. All his life he had appeared to resent anyone named Bellnap, as if we had committed some crime against him just by bearing the name.

We started again on the digging. We used as much of the old tunnel as we thought was straight, thus shortening the job ahead.

On the second night we quit work at dawn and climbed out of our hole to find two guards sitting calmly on our blankets, chewing tobacco and using a cooking pan for a spittoon.

"We been here ten minutes, just listenin' to you boys down there crawlin' and scratchin'. You was havin' such a good time we didn't want to bother you."

"Real industrious, ain't they?" said the other. "Seems like every Yank in this place thinks he's a groundhawg. Where did you reckon you was goin' when you got out, Yanks?"

That was the end of our tunneling. They made us move to the center of the stockade, where we had to bargain for living-space. We were told we'd be shot instantly if we were caught again. We were convinced we had been betrayed; it was a common practice. Two days' extra rations was one of the rewards for informers.

"Those goddam Potters!" Bill Andrews said bitterly.

"They wouldn't turn us in, Bill."

"Not much, they wouldn't! They'd turn us in as quick as a snake would suck eggs! The bastards!"

I didn't say anything more. I knew that a man will do anything when he's been hungry day after day, week after week. I couldn't be very angry. We hadn't been severely punished.

15.

I didn't say anything to my uncle about our suspicions that George or Joe or both had informed on us. But something in my words must have implied it.

"So you see," I was saying, "we didn't hear of them again for a few weeks—"

"Wait a minute, Sam," my uncle interrupted. "Did they tell the rebels you were digging this tunnel?"

I looked at him steadily. "I don't know, Uncle Jeff. Somebody did. Whoever it was, I don't blame him. In that place, a man had to survive as best he could. A little food would justify most anything."

"Don't beat around the bush, Sam. Did they tell on you?"

I shrugged. "Somebody told."

Instantly there was a commotion at the door of the office. Young George Potter stood there glaring at me, his face white, his lips twisted defiantly. "You're a liar!" he shouted. "You're a dirty liar! My father never did it! He never did!"

Uncle Jeff jumped to his feet. "How long have you been listening?"

The boy didn't reply. He tensed for an instant in the doorway. Then he dashed across to me and began pummeling me with his fists and screaming: "Liar!"

Uncle Jeff and Robert pulled him away from me and tried to soothe his wild sobbing. In a minute or so, they had him calmed to a tearful insistence: "Make him say it's a lie, Grandpa!"

"George, listen to me," I said. "Listen, now! I don't think your father did it. I was being truthful when I said I didn't know."

"He didn't!"

"George, let me tell you this. I saw your father in a moment when he was as courageous as any man who ever lived."

"When was that?" the boy whispered, controlling his sobs.

"It's a long story, George. I was telling it to your grandfather. This thing about the tunnel that you heard was part of it, but only part. How much did you listen to?"

"Just about the tunnel."

I looked at Uncle Jeff. He shook his head slightly. I assumed that he didn't want the boy to know yet that his father was dead.

"All right, George. There are parts of this story I'm telling which a boy shouldn't listen to. It's going to take quite a while to tell. So you go home now, and I promise you that your grandfather will tell you all of it when he comes home. All right?"

"I guess so," the boy said. "What was the brave thing my father did?"

"Your grandfather will tell you that later. Will you go home now?"

"Yes." He swiped his eyes with his knuckles and looked at me. "Sam, I'm sorry for what I said."

"Sure, George. I understand."

When he was gone, I gestured helplessly to Uncle Jeff.

"I don't know what you're going to tell him."

"We'll work it out somehow. Go on with your story."

"I wish I didn't have to."

So I continued, giving them the bare outline of the rest of it, omitting as many of the sordid details as possible, although I will put them in the following pages:

My cousins' friends were no longer just "bounty-jumpers." They had formed a gang to prey upon the rest of us. Their leader was a man who called himself Mosby—after the famous rebel raider, I suppose. Indeed, his men called themselves "Mosby's Raiders" and we used that term also.

There were some five hundred of them. They became bolder as the number of prisoners in the stockade increased by thousands, because new men were constantly milling around in the pen, open to sudden attack and having no friends to defend them. At first the Raiders would hit us at night. Almost any morning there might be a body with a slashed throat or a crushed skull in the rows at the main gate waiting to be hauled away to the cemetery. If a prisoner had anything of value—money or new clothing—he might be rushed at any time and robbed, beaten, too often killed.

Cries of "Raiders! Raiders!" could be heard throughout the day. They usually won every skirmish because they were organized. Their headquarters was a large tent on the south side of the pen. Around it were many other tents in good condition, constructed of blankets stolen from sick men. Often at night we would hear them whooping and hooting at one of their parties. They always had plenty of whiskey—procured from the guards for greenbacks—and when they were drunk enough the night would be ripped to shreds by the endless and unvaried rendition of their favorite song, a ballad about an Irish highwayman, which ended in this mournful wail:

Brennan on the moor!
Brennan on the moor!
Bold and undaunted stood
John Brennan on the moor!

Once in late June the Raiders swooped upon our area. There weren't many of them, and we were doing well despite their clubs and knives.

Bill and I were fighting side-by-side against a slow-moving lout twice my size and a knife-wielding little man who looked like a weasel and was just as swift. As Weasel-face was picking himself up and preparing to attack again, I saw a familiar figure run by, carrying a pair of boots in each hand. Bill saw him at the same time. He gave the man mountain a great shove and shouted to me: "After him, Sam! It's Potter! He's got our boots!"

We couldn't chase him very far through the middle of the brawl. Suddenly the Raiders decided they'd had enough, and were gone.

"That low-down ungrateful thieving son of a bitch!" Bill raged. "That sneaking scum!"

We seldom wore our boots in the hot weather, and while the fight was on, George Potter had found them in our hut.

Bill wanted to go to Raidertown and get the boots back. He was raging, and I didn't blame him; I was furious myself. Yet if we went into Mosby's area to recover stolen property, it would mean at least a vicious beating.

"He can't stay there all the time, Bill," I said. "He'll come out by himself and we'll grab him. I don't want to go home to God's country barefooted any more than you do, but neither do I want to get killed by those cutthroats."

"All right," Bill grumbled. "But when I catch that bastard, I'm going to beat his brains out!"

We had no prisoners' government in the stockade, and the rebels wouldn't have cared if the Raiders had killed us all. No one wanted to bother organizing for protection. The usual answer was: "We'll be exchanged this month. What the hell? I got nothing the Raiders want, anyway."

Late in June, however, a police force was formed under Sergeant Leroy Key, Sixteenth Illinois Cavalry. On the third of July, this little army, called the Regulators, lined up to wipe out Raidertown. The rest of us, twenty thousand

men, acres and acres of human faces, were tiered on the slopes of the enclosure to watch the battle.

The Regulators marched forward in close order. The Raiders moved to meet them. They met with an outburst of yelling, and for a few seconds there was a savage twisting mob. Clubs rose and fell. In the brilliant sunlight we could see knives flashing.

For more than a minute they fought fiercely. Suddenly the Raiders broke and ran, with the Regulators running after them, collaring prisoners by the score.

A great shout went up from the watchers on the other slope, and I even saw several of the Georgia militia on the palisade waving their muskets in the air. Even newcomers to Andersonville, men who had come in within the week, understood that we were free of a menace, that the Regulators had won a great victory for everyone. All day long Key and his men traveled through the stockade, seeking out the known leaders of the Raiders and penning them in one of the gate enclosures with the permission of the prison commandant.

"These men were rounded up, you see, and it was necessary to punish some of them as an example." I paused and asked Robert if he had any cigars.

"Sure, Sam, sure," he said absently, taking three from his waistcoat pocket. Uncle Jeff refused. Robert and I lit our cigars with paper twists ignited in the potbelly stove in the corner of the office.

"I've thought about it ever since. There was nothing else the Regulators could do but try to punish them. The rest of us in the stockade had to be protected. Well, the next day—"

I sat on the ground before our hut, searching for a few of the more elusive dwellers in the seams of my shirt. I was thinking of Highland Landing, not in the manner of most

men who have been long away from home, but as a man who has been four months in rebel prisons would think of it. No familiar streets lined with maples and elms, no wide stretch of blue water with verdant hills beyond, no old friends smiling in glad recognition, not even Martha with the cool quizzical smile and the black hair glinting in the sun, the gray eyes clear with the joy of my return and then misting with the happiness of the future. Not those things! My mind was drawing a series of vivid pictures, rich scenes of the greatest wealth the Hudson Valley had ever offered to its people: creaking wagon loads of peaches and apples and pears from the orchards of the Highland County plain on their way to the waterfront for shipment; whole acres of blackberries and blueberries and blackcaps; gallon upon rich gallon of creamy milk; I could hear the wonderful hollow thunk of a great yellow pumpkin half-hidden in the cornshocks and I could taste the mellow sweetness of the pies it would make; I could recall the rows of dripping halves of beef being hung in Weinhaber's icebox; I could taste the frost-tang of the Concord grapes in our arbor. I wanted to cry. Maybe I was crying. All those wonderful things to eat, and here I sat, cooking cornmeal mush and whiling the time by popping big fat lice between my forefinger and thumb.

I heard my name being called.

It was a tall dark soldier whom I recognized as one of Key's assistants in the Regulators. I remember that they called him "Limber Jim." He was picking his way through the tents and the sprawled sick men nearby, occasionally calling my name.

"Hey, Sam Bellnap! Anybody around here know Sam Bellnap, Fifth New York Cavalry?"

I knew what it was before he told me.

"—and one of them says you're a lawyer and he wants to see you. You don't have to come if you don't want."

"I'll come," I answered.

"They got one lawyer already. They don't need you. You won't do no good."

"You're going to try them?"

"Try 'em and swing 'em!"

"All of them?" I asked incredulously.

"Just seven. For murder. This friend of yours is one of them," he said with a contemptuous stare at me. I suppose he suspected me of every crime committed in the prison in the past month.

"It's one of the Potter brothers," I said. "Which one, George or Joe?"

"Damned if I know their names. I wouldn't care if I did know. Bounty-jumpers don't give their right names, anyway. You ask Roy Key. He's running the whole shindig. Come on if you're coming."

There were about one hundred and twenty-five of the Raiders confined in the miniature stockade of the north gate. Limber Jim led me up to Sergeant Key, who stood with a group of his men near the gate.

"Here's this lawyer, Roy," Limber Jim said.

"Your name Bellnap?" Key asked.

"That's right."

"You're the one he asked for. I checked up on you already. You're his cousin, aren't you?"

"Yes. I've known him all his life. He isn't guilty of anything."

I still didn't know which one they had penned in the gate enclosure.

"That's for the court to decide. You can go in to see him. I may as well tell you now that the trial starts tomorrow. Seven of them will be tried together, for murder. We'll draw up the charges tonight and show them to you."

"You can't try all of them together!"

"Who says we can't? They didn't murder one man at a time, did they?"

"My cousin didn't murder anybody. I hope you're going to give me a fair chance to prove that."

"Do your best, friend. This will be as fair as possible, and then we'll hang them in a hurry."

He turned away from me as if there were nothing more to be said. Limber Jim opened the gate and pushed me in among the captives. Most of them sat around the enclosure talking unconcernedly. There was a loud dice game in one corner. A few men were assiduously hunting lice.

George Potter, followed by Joe, came running up to me as I stood looking around.

"Thank God you're here, Sam! Those crazy fools want to hang me!"

So it was George they charged with murder.

"I never killed anybody, Sam. I wasn't in on the killings, none of them. All I ever did was rob a few huts."

"Slow down, George," I told him. "I'll do everything I can for you. Hello, Joe," I nodded. "What have they got you charged with?"

He glared at me, and then spoke slowly. "The only reason we're here, Bellnap, is because you and that Andrews bastard told them to pick us up!"

"No, Joe. The first I heard of it was a few minutes ago."

"How did they know our names? How'd they know enough to come searching for us?"

"Listen, Sam!" George grabbed my shoulders and swung me around. He talked excitedly into my face. "Don't listen to Joe! I know you never said anything to them about us. They had everybody's name, not just ours. I want you to get me out of here. You can do it. Why, I hardly know Mosby at all. There he is over there. Go ask him if he knows me! Honest, Sam, I never killed anybody. I'm innocent, Sam!"

Of course he was innocent, and yet I couldn't help myself—I glanced down at his feet. He was wearing my boots. I remembered Bill Andrews' voice: "Steal a man's boots in this muckhole and you might as well shoot him and be done with it."

George's eyes followed mine. I looked up to see a sneer on Joe's lips. George sat down quickly on the dirt floor of the stockade, tearing at the boots.

"Sam, for Christ's sake, take 'em. I didn't know they were yours when I took 'em. I'd never steal my cousin's boots. Here, take 'em back! Just as good as they ever were."

"What did I say right off?" Joe yelled. "He turned us in to get his goddam boots back. And you ask him to help you! He'll be standing there laughing when they swing you, the bastard!"

I ignored Joe for the moment. He had reason enough to suspect me, God knows. Many a man had been killed or maimed in that place for the sake of a pair of broken boots or a worn-out overcoat. It took me quite a while to convince George that I wouldn't take the boots, although I certainly wanted them badly enough.

"When I get you free, George," I said, smiling with the assurance I felt then. After all, he was innocent of murder. That I knew. "When the trial's over, you can give them back."

"You'll be my lawyer then, Sam?" he said, grabbing my forearms and shaking me in his eagerness. "They said we could have a lawyer or conduct our own defense. I knew you'd remember old times, Sam."

"All right, George," I said. "Now tell me the whole story. We'll just tell the truth to the court, and you'll get off."

"For Christ's sake," Joe exclaimed. "Why don't you leave us alone?"

"Don't mind him, Sam. Listen, I never did anything but a little stealing from those who had plenty and wouldn't share. Except when I took the boots, Sam. I don't know what got into me. But I never stole anything from a sick man like some of these fellows. Can't we just say I'm innocent?"

"Not to those men, George. They're set on hanging somebody. We'll admit these other things, and then concentrate on keeping you apart from the other defendants. They certainly don't have any witnesses who saw you murder anybody. We'll get you off, George."

"Jesus, George, don't listen to him!" Joe shouted. "He's going to turn you right over to them."

"Joe, you go on off and don't bother us," George said. "Sam will take care of everything. You go on, now."

There was a hatred in Joe's eyes which amazed me. "You're not fooling me, Bellnap," he shouted. "If he hangs, I'll kill you!" Then he walked away, as if he were through with the whole affair.

"He's crazy, Sam! No, I mean it. Really crazy! I've been noticing it for a month or so now. Talks to himself, and mutters about people trying to kill him, and all that. You know how some of them get in here after a few months. He had me scared a couple of times. He really thinks you turned us in, Sam. I tried to talk him out of it, but it didn't do any good."

"He'll get over it, George. Let's get back to this trial. I'm confident they don't have any evidence."

"There's one thing I didn't tell you, Sam. When they picked me up, I had a gun."

"A gun! In this place?"

"Yeah. One of Mosby's friends had it. I traded that other pair of boots for it last week. I thought maybe Joe and I could get away if we had a gun."

"Even possession of a gun doesn't prove anything."

"It's probably the only gun in the pen, and they caught me with it in my pocket. Somebody must have told them I had it."

"They can't hang you for having a gun. They'd all have one if they could."

"You've never seen another gun in this place, have you? It's one of those old-fashioned single-shot pistols the reb cavalry used to use. The thing that makes it bad is this. A man on the west side was shot with it the night before I traded for it."

"Didn't anyone see you trade the boots for it? How about Joe?"

"He saw it. But who'd believe him? And there's the man I got it from." He pointed to one of the men in the dice game. "But I asked him to tell that Sergeant Key about it, and he just laughed and said I was crazy. I think he's the one turned me in."

"I'm sure they'll believe us, George."

"Of course they will. You're a good lawyer, Sam. You can get me off."

I sat there for an hour, talking to him. He gave me all the details of his life among the Raiders, and we sorted them, selecting them to make a pattern of "lie down with a dog and you'll get up with fleas." I thought that was his best chance. He was half-convicted by association; if we could hold it to that, and explain the gun, they might be lenient. I went over and talked to Mosby and the rest, but they scoffed at me.

"Look, soldier," Mosby said. "If I clear your friend there —what the hell's his name, anyway? Potter—if I clear Potter, what happens to me? Guilty!" He made a quick gesture toward his neck, tilted his head aside, and rolled his eyeballs. "I don't know a thing about anything, soldier. Let me tell you something. I'm a gambler. If a man puts his money in a game, let him play his own cards. I'll play mine."

The others took their cue from Mosby; I could get none of them to promise to clear George at the trial.

When I returned to our hut, I told Bill what had happened.

"Fine!" he said with a swift nod of his head. "Good! I hope they string the son of a bitch high so I can get a good look at him."

"You're going to testify for him."

"The hell I am!"

"Yes, you are. The first thing I want you to do is go around the stockade and find every man here from the Fifth New York. And every man who knew George when he lived among the Raiders. You're all going to testify for him."

"I told you, Sam. He can hang for all of me."

"We haven't got much time to round them up," I said, giving him a tap on the shoulder. "You'd better get started."

He grumbled, but soon set off. I went back to the north gate with a borrowed knife to trim George's hair and beard. I also borrowed a pail from Key and went to the creek for water to rid George of the accumulation of several weeks' grime. Although the Raiders may have lived in relative luxury, they were dirtier than most of us poor people.

They weren't going to waste any time with that trial. I found that out early the next morning. Key made a short speech and then picked the court from men who had recently arrived in Andersonville, so that the accused might not be judged by any of their victims. The court was hearing evidence by ten o'clock.

Sergeant Richard McCullough, from a Missouri regiment of Sherman's army, was president. There were thirteen sergeants who made up the court. Unfortunately for the purposes of the trial, they were all fine soldiers and so had little experience with army justice. Any points of contention

were settled by a hurried consultation between Key and McCullough. I suppose they were fair enough.

The only other defense counsel was one of the Raiders' own, a New York lawyer named Pete Bradley. He kept interrupting with loud-mouthed contemptuous suggestions for Key and his men. He was of little aid to his friends, it was apparent from the beginning. He immediately alienated the court with his insults. McCullough was forced to silence him several times by threatening to throw him out of the trial.

Bradley paid no attention to me, and this attitude pleased me. Everything he did to prejudice his own clients' position, I thought, would help George, since my entire effort was to be concentrated on the separation of George's case from the rest in the minds of the members of the court. Indeed, several times when Bradley included all the defendants in a sweeping gesture, I objected, asking that he be instructed to exclude George from any statements he might make.

Captain Henry Wirz, the prison commandant, and several of his junior officers brought camp chairs into the stockade and sat behind the court, enjoying the proceedings hugely. Captain Wirz, an undersized fidgety man, with a grizzled beard and a face for all the world like that of a rodent, kept slapping his thighs and interrupting the trial with loud shouts in broken English: "Py Gott! Vatch dem dam Yankees, vill you! I nefer had such a time in my life!" The trial had to stop several times an hour to allow Wirz to finish an outburst of laughter and an accumulation of delighted Swiss profanity.

It was a chaotic affair at times. Often a witness would get tired of waiting to be called and would wander over to the crowd to visit with his friends. The Regulators had to go searching for him when it was time for him to testify.

The seven accused (the other hundred-odd were still in the small stockade, with the exception of those called as

witnesses) sat in the middle of the court on the ground. Once in the first days of the trial, during a heated debate between Bradley and Key, the leader Mosby rose to his feet, stretched, and sauntered off into the crowd. No one but myself and a couple of his fellows noticed his departure.

Key finally stretched his arm in a denunciatory gesture and shouted: "That man there— Where the hell is he?"

It took half an hour to find him curled up in a dugout near the swamp. He returned under guard of the Regulators, a huge grin on his face and the cheers of his friends to encourage him. I thought Wirz would topple from his camp chair, he was laughing so uproariously.

Such was the fear among the prisoners of the vengeance of the Raiders, that the prosecution found it somewhat difficult to get many of those who had been badly abused to testify at the trial.

Unfortunately for us, however, the first witness to take the stand that morning was the tentmate of the man who had been murdered with George's gun. He testified that he had seen George do the shooting. He remarked that he would remember that "bestial face" until his dying day.

The witness was a small gentle-appearing man—"mealy-mouthed" my mother would have called him—and he seemed about to apologize for everything he said. His soft voice and timid mien, however, concealed a surprising stubbornness. I found that out on cross-examination.

"You remember well the night in question?"

"I do."

"What kind of night was it?"

"Like every other night in this place. Terrible!"

"Was there a moon that night?"

"Maybe. Maybe not."

"Don't you know?"

"I was in my tent. Lying down, sick."

"You were lying sick in your tent and yet you saw everything that happened outside the tent? You want the court to believe that?"

"You calling me a liar, Mister? If you had any brains, you'd know if I got a tent, it's got holes in it big enough to see out of."

"All right, you looked through the holes. You say you saw a man shoot your friend. Just how sick were you?"

"I wasn't very sick. I just had the squitters."

The entire assemblage roared. Wirz howled like some great puppy.

"Squitters, he had!" Wirz shouted. "Py Gott! Dot's a goot vun!"

The witness was flame-red with anger at me, as if I had been the one who had provoked the mirth.

"Why didn't you step outside to see better when you heard the Raiders?"

"I was afraid to move. I thought maybe I'd ruin my breeches if I moved."

This time it was several minutes before the uproar subsided. The little man was furious at me.

"Had you ever seen this man before, the one you say killed your friend?"

His answer surprised me. I thought that he would admit that George was a stranger to him.

"Many times," he said loudly. "I saw him with all of them others."

"If you knew him, then why didn't you report him to the prison commandant? Or did all this recognition come to you when you saw him here?"

"Report him?" the man gasped. "Why, why—they'd give him a thirty days' furlough for shooting a Yankee!"

Captain Wirz jumped up and down in delight. All his officers laughed and nodded their heads in agreement.

During all this, Joe Potter sat among the several witnesses

from the captured Raiders who had been called by Key or Bradley or myself. Every time I glanced at Joe, he stared at me in sullen hatred.

"I suppose I was wrong, now that I've had time to think about it."

I stared at the dead stump of the cigar Robert had given me.

"Maybe I should have tried to deal with that Illinois man I mentioned—Sergeant Key. Or I should have appealed to Wirz. But I thought I could get him off. And yet everything I said was the wrong thing, Uncle Jeff."

"I know you did what you thought was best for my boy, Sam."

"I tried. God knows, I tried."

"Sam, maybe it would be better if you didn't tell the rest of it," Robert said. "Maybe Uncle Jeff has heard enough. We both know what you're going to tell us."

"You keep on, Sam," my uncle said. "I want to know."

All that reasonable doubt they had spoken of when they opened the trial—it didn't exist, had never existed in anyone's mind except mine and Joe's and a few men whom Bill had gathered from the Fifth New York.

Almost every witness for the prosecution, many of them with a "There! That'll fix you" look at me, testified that he had seen George Potter knock a comrade in the head or cut another's throat.

Reflecting upon it, I suppose they were right. The crimes within the stockade had to end. The only way to end them was to punish the criminals. The charge against George was enough for the witnesses. If he was innocent, what was he doing there?

When it was nearing the end, and all the defense witnesses had been heard, it was my turn to sum up to the

court. I gave it my best effort. I fought against the hopelessness within me. Just at my final words, when I asked for justice for an innocent man, someone in the crowd yelled: "Don't listen to him! That's his cousin! He's probably a murderer, too!"

Only Captain Wirz, who hugely enjoyed the entire proceeding, applauded when I had finished. His approval was probably the finishing touch. Everyone else simply stared at me without emotion. All but Joe Potter; he no longer had his eyes fixed on my face. He sat with his forehead in his folded arms, waiting to be taken back to the stockade.

"There was nothing else they could have done, Uncle Jeff. It was decided as soon as the Regulators won that skirmish four days before. I didn't even have to hear the words—"

"The accused will stand and face the court."

Sergeant McCullough waited until the seven stood. Then he read from a slip of paper:

"John Sarsfield, One Hundred and Forty-Fourth New York;

"William Collins, alias William Mosby, Eighty-Eighth Pennsylvania;

"Charles Curtis, Fifth Rhode Island Artillery;

"Patrick Delaney, Eighty-Third Pennsylvania;

"A. Muir, United States Navy;

"Terence Sullivan, Seventy-Second New York;

"George Potter, Fifth New York Cavalry.

"You have been brought before this court and charged severally and as a group with the murders of ten members of the United States Army. You have had every opportunity to prove your innocence. You have conducted your own defense, or have had it conducted in accordance with your wishes. This court has heard the evidence against you,

and has heard your appeals against that evidence. Despite the very unusual nature of this trial, it has been conducted as closely as possible to the spirit and intent of both civil and military law.

"It is the judgment of this court, after due consideration of all the extraordinary circumstances under which it was called, that you men are all guilty as charged, and it is the sentence of this court that, at a time and place later to be determined, but within this stockade at Camp Sumter, Georgia, you will all be hanged by the neck until you are dead."

A great cheer went up from the crowd as McCullough finished. All the condemned men received the news without emotion; indeed, two or three of them smiled. I watched George closely, but he showed no fear.

I had a moment to speak to him before they were led away. He winked at me as if we shared a secret.

"I'll appeal to Captain Wirz," I said. "I'll claim that this court had no jurisdiction under Army regulations."

"Don't you worry none, Sam," he answered with a smile. "It's all fixed." Again he winked.

"What do you mean, fixed?"

"Mosby had some money. He paid Captain Wirz, and we're going to be transferred. It's all right, Sam."

"Are you sure?"

"I saw him pay it over last night. We'll be out of here before Key and them knows what happened. Maybe we'll even get exchanged."

"I hope you're right, George. At any rate, I'll be around every day to see you."

I tried to talk to Wirz before I returned to our hut, but he not only refused to see me, he gave the guard orders to shoot me if I came within ten yards of the outer gate again.

Later that day, it was decided to punish the rest of the Raiders, more than a hundred of them, by forcing them to

run the gantlet. Thousands of prisoners formed a double line through which the guards pushed the Raiders. Several of them were beaten so severely that they died, and many scores were seriously hurt. I found Joe Potter lying senseless on the ground, bruised and bleeding from a hundred cuts and welts. Bill and I half-carried, half-dragged him to the hut he and George had shared in Raidertown. He was conscious again by that time, although scarcely coherent. He certainly didn't recognize me, because he kept telling me he was going to kill that Bellnap bastard the next time he saw him.

16.

When I went to see George on the morning of the ninth of July, he told me they had been informed that the execution would be on the eleventh.

"It's all right, Sam. Mosby was talking to Wirz last night. We'll get out of here."

I still hoped for the chance to appeal to Wirz, although he hadn't been seen inside the stockade since the trial. I hadn't much faith in Mosby's bribe; George and the other six seemed totally unconcerned.

The morning of July 11 was bright and clear. It had become generally known among the prisoners that the executions would take place that day, and early in the morning crowds began to form around the gallows site.

Key had secured a few beams and rough planks from an officer of the Georgia militia, sufficient to build a rude scaffold. The carpenters set to work, and by noon the scaffold was finished. It was a simple structure, with planks supported by cleats and uprights to form a drop which was released by ropes held by the executioners.

About ten thousand men were packed tightly on the slopes of the south hill near the scaffold. Twenty thousand more wedged themselves into a solid mass on the north hill. The heat was terrible. The densely packed, motionless crowds were patched here and there with an open space as a man collapsed and his fellows bent to aid him.

I watched all this from the gate enclosure. George was chatting, a trifle nervously now, with Mosby, who was reassuring him that Wirz would be along soon.

Then I saw seven men leave the ranks of the Regulators around the scaffold and come toward us, each man carrying a white mealsack.

I turned and looked at the condemned men. They all looked confident, a little contemptuous of the preparations being made for them. Two of them, Sullivan and Delaney, were chatting cheerfully with Father Hamilton, a priest from Macon, the only man of God who had ever come among the prisoners at Andersonville.

I suggested to George that he might want to speak to the priest for a few moments.

"No, Sam. Some of these others are Catholics. It means a lot to them. Besides, there's no need, Sam. Wirz will come for us. If he doesn't—well, Sam, I want you to know that I'm not afraid to die. When you get home, you tell my boy that and my dad, too. If I have to go out there, Sam, I'll be a man. I'm not going to break down. I'm innocent, but I'm not going to beg them for mercy. It won't do no good now, will it, Sam?"

"If Wirz doesn't come—no, George, it won't do any good."

His nerves were breaking; his face twitched and his hands were shaking. But he was brave. It surprised me—I had been dreading this time because I was sure they would have to drag him to the scaffold. Now I knew that he would be all right. His eyes were clear and calm, and his voice was almost steady.

The men with the mealsacks were almost to the gate now.

"They're coming for you, George," I said softly. "Is there anything more I can do, anything else?"

"Stay with me, Sam. I'm pretty scared! Do you think they're going to do it?"

I couldn't answer him.

"Look after little George and my wife, will you, Sam?

They won't have anybody. He's a fine boy. Going to be just like my dad. Watch out for that boy, will you, Sam?"

"All right, George. I'll see that they have everything they need. Don't worry about them now."

"Don't tell them about this."

"I won't."

"One thing more. I want you to have your boots back. I'm sorry about them. And I'm not going to need them now."

I protested vigorously, but he sat on the ground and pulled them off and handed them to me. He wriggled his bare toes and smiled weakly.

"They were a little small."

"Here comes Wirz now!" Mosby called.

The captain came through the doorway, accompanied by a squad of reb infantry.

"You men!" he shouted. "You come now."

"I told you, Sam!" George exulted. "Goodbye and thanks for all you did for me. I'll never forget. I'll see you in Highland Landing."

"Goodbye, George."

The captives followed Wirz eagerly through the gate, pushing and shoving each other as if they were afraid they might be left behind. Even the fact that they were going into the stockade, instead of out of it through the outside gate, didn't seem to mean anything to them.

When they were outside, however, the seven men with the mealsacks moved in upon them and the rebs held their muskets ready. The entire procession, Wirz at its head, moved toward the scaffold. I followed through the gap in the ranks of watching prisoners and arrived in the first rank of spectators.

Father Hamilton walked with the seven, his face gray, his lips moving almost imperceptibly.

One of the rebs led up Wirz's knobby old white horse,

and the commandant mounted it and then addressed the massed thousands in a loud voice:

"Brizners, I return to you dese men so goot as I got dem. You haf tried dem yourselves, and haf found dem guilty. I haf had notting to do wit it. I vash my hands of eferting connected wit dem. Do wit dem as you like, and may Gott haf mercy on you and on dem. Garts, about face! Vorwarts, march!"

The rebels marched through the crowd and were gone.

The silence was so complete that somewhere in the area near the swamp a sick man could be heard crying over and over in pitiful despair: "Why won't somebody kill me? I can't stand it! Please come and kill me!"

The seven doomed men looked stunned. They seemed to realize for the first time that they were going to die. The first to move was Mosby, who raised both fists into the air and screamed after Wirz: "You dirty, sneakin' bastard! I hope that Sherman rips your guts out! I hope they burn you on a slow fire!"

The rest of his words were lost as the others also shrieked imprecations after the vanished Wirz. The Raiders in the crowd began to murmur. Key's men lifted their clubs in preparation for an attack.

One of the seven, the sailor Muir, turned to Key.

"My God, man, you don't really mean to hang us up there? Jesus, you can't mean it!"

"That's about the size of it," Key answered.

Now they burst into a storm of pleading, calling on us all to save them, yelling to their comrades among the spectators to break through and free them. It was pitiful to watch them. Sullivan had a white froth at the corners of his mouth and his eyes rolled crazily. Sarsfield was chewing at his knuckles, paying no attention to the blood which spurted forth. Of them all, only Mosby and George Potter were relatively calm. George was trembling, however, and

his eyes darted in mute appeal across the mass of faces.

Suddenly Delaney stopped yelling and tried to quiet the others. "Wait! Wait!" he said. "Let the priest talk for us."

Father Hamilton closed the book upon which his eyes had been bent, and turning to face the thousands of prisoners, he began a plea for mercy.

"Listen to me, men! You must not do this terrible deed! You have no right—"

I watched George. He saw me, and despite the awful ordeal of the moment, he managed a smile.

Then I noticed Joe Potter directly across the rectangle from me. He was glaring straight across. His face twisted into an evil grimace as his gaze traveled between the boots in my hand and my face.

It took the crowd a few seconds to comprehend what the priest was saying. When the massed ranks understood, they cut off his words immediately with one vast shout: "No! No! Hang the bastards! Hang the bastards! Hang 'em! Hang 'em! Hang 'em!"

I watched George Potter's face twisting with fear of death. I wanted to call out to him, to run forward and touch him, to help him somehow, anyhow, just to let him know I was still with him. Then his face became calm. Suddenly he shouted.

"By God, I'll die this way first!"

He ducked his head, folded his arms around it, and dashed forward into the middle of the Regulators' line. They converged on him, sudden as his move was, and began to strike at his head with their clubs. They knocked him to his knees, but they crowded so upon him that they couldn't hit him any more, and then he had vanished into the mob.

Delaney, who had been standing beside him, started to follow. He took one step. At the same instant Limber Jim was right in front of him with a bowie knife in his right hand.

"Move another step, you son of a bitch, and I'll open you from one end to the other."

Delaney stopped.

Meanwhile, the Regulators were after George, and they soon caught him and started him back. Key ordered the other six up on the scaffold. They climbed the ladder without much protest. The priest resumed his prayers.

I stepped up to Limber Jim and asked to speak to Key. He let me through the line.

"Sergeant Key," I said. "I want to make a last appeal for Potter. He's as innocent as you are."

He turned cold hard eyes upon me. "He hangs with the rest of them. Get back in the crowd!"

"You're committing murder yourself!"

"Back in the crowd! They're all going to hang!"

Several of his men elbowed me back to my place.

When they brought George back, he sat on the ground for a minute or so to rest, and then, dripping with the slime of the swamp where they had chased him, he slowly climbed the steps. Mosby seemed to think that George was more terrified than exhausted, and he called out to him: "Come on you—Potter—be a man!"

Key held up his hand.

"You men have two minutes."

They all began to give farewell messages to their friends. George smiled weakly at me, and then called to Joe: "Goodbye, Joe. Goodbye, brother." He was crying now, but he stood without aid, almost proudly, on the scaffold. Joe Potter didn't answer. He stared alternately at George and at me.

George tried once more to have Mosby clear him.

"You're about to die, man! Tell them I'm innocent!"

Mosby just stared coldly at him.

"You can save me, Mosby! Speak up, for God's sake, man!"

There was no answer.

Delaney called out cheerfully: "Well, goodbye, boys. Any of yez that I've hurt, I want yez to forgive me. Will yez all forgive me?"

Everyone was silent.

"Then the hell with yez all," Delaney shouted.

"Time's up," Key called.

Each of the seven hangmen tied a condemned man's hands, pulled the mealsack over his head, placed the noose around his neck, drew it tight, and jumped to the ground. The priest prayed in a louder voice.

Hot as the day was, the palms of my hands were icy cold and I could feel the chill sweat running down my fingers. I was nauseated; I clamped my teeth tightly together as if that might help me to avoid vomiting. The man next to me began to grind his teeth. Then he was whispering:

"God, they're gonna do it! Jesus, don't let me watch! Don't do it! Don't do it!"

He clutched my arm and squeezed it tightly, and I unashamedly put both my arms around him—he seemed to give me self-control. I wasn't going to vomit now, but I lost all my strength. I thought I might faint. We held each other. We both sobbed.

Key lifted his hand, then dropped it. The supports were pulled away and the planks fell. Seven bodies swung dizzily in the air.

That was all I could tell my uncle. The little office was silent; Uncle Jeff was staring at the floor. I knew that he was crying. There was more to the story, but it would be unkind to tell it—

One day, several weeks after the executions, I sat cross-legged in the shadow of our hut, trying to soften the dried-out leather of my boots with a bit of bacon grease.

I wasn't having much success. I didn't notice anyone approach.

"You killed him to get your boots back, didn't you, Bellnap?"

I looked up. Joe Potter stood over me with a short thick club in his hand.

"I did the best I knew for him, Joe. You know that."

"You turned him over to them, and then you helped them hang him! I saw you that day, whispering to Key!"

"You know I wouldn't do a thing like that, Joe."

"I know you! You're goddam right I know you! He'd be alive if it wasn't for you and that stinking cowardly brother of yours. Your dirty money put George in the army. Your yellow-dog brother wouldn't fight, but he paid a man to die for him! A man with a wife and kid! Call yourselves the town's first family! The town's first bastards, that's what you are! Send a man to die for a rotten pair of boots! You killed him, Bellnap!" He screamed the last words, and then his voice dropped to a harsh whisper: "And now I'm going to kill you!"

I saw his arms rise over his head. His slitted eyes glared at me. His yellow teeth were gritted through his dark beard. Then he struck, swiftly, before I had a chance to rise. My leg was still very stiff. I wasn't quick enough. He was beating my shoulders and head with the club. Bill Andrews and several others came running up and dragged him off. I lay on the ground, half senseless. The only thing that saved me was his lack of strength, I think. For once I was thankful for our short rations. Blood flowed across my face and I could taste it in my mouth. As if there were a storm rising in the great distance which seemed to separate us, I heard his voice faintly, screaming back at me as they pulled him away: "I'll kill you, Bellnap! You and your goddam brother! I'll kill you both!"

17.

"George was a brave man at the end, Uncle Jeff. That is the truth. He died with courage."

I got up from the table and walked over to the window, trying to see the street outside through the flyspecks and the cobwebs. My uncle was very still in his chair.

"I did my best," I said. "I failed him. He was innocent, and I couldn't prove it. There must have been something I could have done! That's what I've been saying ever since. I could have found a way!"

Still he didn't speak. I turned to look at him. His gray head was bent over his hands, as if he were praying. I put out my hand toward him and then withdrew it. My voice was shaking when I spoke again.

"I tried, Uncle Jeff. You believe me?"

His voice was weary, old, almost inaudible. "Thank you, Sam, I thank you. You did your best."

"He had more heart than any man I've ever seen."

My brother Robert came forward from the window.

"Is there anything on God's earth I can do, Uncle Jeff? Is there any way of helping? I was the one who sent him. There ought to be some way—"

"No," my uncle said. "Nothing, Robert. Thank you. Don't feel bad about it. He would of gone anyway."

"There's no reason for anyone to know," I said. "Let it be forgotten from this moment on. He was a good soldier. That's all anyone need know."

My uncle stared at the floor and his head nodded in tiny motions again and again as I spoke. His fingers still played with the loose wool of his frayed sweater.

He looked up and ventured a smile. There were tears running down his cheeks. "Was he a good soldier, Sam?"

I nodded. "A good soldier and a brave man."

"Thank you, Sam." He paused for a moment while he dabbed his cheeks with a handkerchief. "And what about Joe?"

"I can't tell you, Uncle Jeff. I saw him only once after that. But he'll be coming home soon."

"How bad is he?"

"I don't know. I hope he's all right. In September they moved us out of Andersonville for fear of Sherman. I think Joe went to a prison called Blackshear, farther south in Georgia. Listen, Uncle Jeff, if he hasn't changed—then I know he'll be difficult to handle on the subject of the Bellnaps, but if he needs anything, you come to Robert or me. A job or maybe a start at something new. And George's wife and the boy. Robert and I will want to talk to you about them. We'll work something out together."

"We'll look out for them," Robert added.

"Don't worry about us. We'll make out. I thank you, though."

"Uncle Jeff, I hate to say it this way, but—well, when Joe gets home, will you remember that he's been sick? That was the worst disease those prisons bred, the one that twisted a man's mind into imagining everyone an enemy. He'll get over it."

"Sure he will, Sam. I'll look after him."

"What are you going to tell George's wife and young George?"

"I don't know."

"Listen, Uncle Jeff. George is dead because a lot of men thought they were justified in telling lies on the witness stand. Let's tell one more that will do some good. Say that he was shot escaping."

"Maybe that would be best."

"What about Joe's story when he comes home?" Robert asked.

"I'll keep him from talking," Uncle Jeff said.

"Was there anyone else from Highland Landing there in prison, Sam?"

"No. Nor from the county either."

"What about records? Books? There have been books published already about the prisons."

"I think I've fixed that, Robert, so that his name won't appear. I had several long talks with Sergeant Key after it was over. He seemed to think that perhaps he had been wrong about George. He agreed to give George another name, an alias such as the rest of them undoubtedly used. All his records of the trial will be marked that way."

"So the boy need never know how his father died," Robert said. "Let him think he was a hero."

"He was, Robert," I said softly.

"Yes, you're right, Sam. Is there anything more we can do, Uncle Jeff?"

"Thank you, boys. Nothing."

"Close up then and go home to George's wife," Robert told him.

"We'll see you soon, Uncle Jeff. When the snow clears I'm going to take that grandson of yours out on the colt."

"He'll like that, Sam."

"You go on home now," Robert repeated. "Leave the key to the stable over in Weinhaber's. They'll take care of things."

"I'm not going home just yet," Uncle Jeff sighed. "I'm going to take time to think about it. She's waited too long already for news of George. She can wait a little longer to hear that he's dead."

"I'll send up the horse and buggy I'm using, Uncle Jeff, after I get down to the train. Weinhaber's butcherboy can take care of him."

"I'll need a buggy or something myself," I said. "Can I take my pick, Uncle Jeff?"

"Sure, Sam. You know what you want."

After Robert left, I went into the stable and harnessed a big bay to a light buggy. As I worked, my conscience bothered me. I hadn't told my uncle about my last meeting with Joe. Perhaps I should have. Yet he'd had enough for one day. Telling him about Joe would only add to his sorrow.

When the buggy was ready, I led the bay out through the double doors. As I passed the office, I saw my uncle sitting there in the chair, staring at the floor and plucking at his sleeve.

18.

I drove the buggy up First Street hill, past Grand to Liberty Street and turned left. Ahead of me was the courthouse. I was about to drive out Liberty Street, and I changed my mind. Instead, I tied the bay to the rail on the edge of the sidewalk.

The courthouse was a two-story red brick building surrounded by tall maples on grounds which covered an entire city block. A wide flagstone walk led up from the sidewalk to the standstone steps. Beside the walk on the right, halfway to the steps, was a chunk of upright marble topped by a bronze soldier in the uniform of the Continental Army. Opposite it on the left was a like memorial; this soldier was a bronze counterpart of those who fought in the War of 1812.

They conveniently forgot the Mexican War, I thought, because three such would be out of balance. It's all right now, though—they've had another war and so they can put in one for the Mexican War and one for us. They'll do it on Fourth of July and everybody will make a speech—I might even make a speech. A few more generations and this place is going to be cluttered up with bronze infantrymen standing around. Maybe they'll put in a couple of cavalrymen to vary the monotony. I'd enjoy making a speech if they put up cavalrymen.

I kept forgetting that I wasn't going to be around very long—certainly not until Fourth of July.

I went along the walk, up the steps, and hauled on the heavy door. It swung open after much effort—as if silently

to say that those who hungered and thirsted after justice in Highland County had better not be weak. I was in the high-ceilinged hallway. The courthouse exuded the old familiar musty smell, a little sour, as if all the dark corners of the building were packed with dusty papers curling in the dampness (as they were) and as if there were several never-thoroughly-cleaned brass cuspidors in every room (as there were).

I passed the sheriff's office, and the town clerk's office, the city clerk's office, the county clerk's office, and several other assorted offices. Walking down the long hallway, I paused at the huge white swinging doors whose opaque glass panels were lettered in gold: "District Court, Highland County, N.Y." No, I thought, he isn't in there now. Not this late in the morning. He's the fastest man at clearing a courtroom this county ever had.

Remembering the name they knew him by at the county jail, I grinned and repeated the words to myself: "Thirty Days" Crist. It had been almost an unvarying routine at morning court in those months before the war. The culprits would be marched before the bar, the arresting officer would say a few words, the lawyer would speak his piece, and Martha's father would eventually look up and smile benignly: "Thirty days! Next case!"

Now I looked beyond the courtroom, to a single door, this one mahogany-paneled. Its lettering read: "Judge's Chambers," and in smaller letters in the right-hand corner: "Homer Crist."

I knocked on the paneling below the glass. I was afraid I might break the glass if I tapped on it.

His voice, muffled by the heavy door, called: "Come in. Come right in."

He was sitting behind a big dark desk which was cluttered with papers. His long equine face and shock of unruly black hair were bent over a big volume which was unmis-

takably a Bible. I noticed immediately, although his face was lowered, that he had grown a beard. He didn't look up. I wondered whom he had been expecting. He was certainly trying to impress someone with that intent perusal of the Bible, not even glancing at me in the doorway.

"Sit down and make yourself homely, sir. I'm checking the Lord's words here. Most often I find that they're more suitable than mine."

Smiling a little, I sat in a leather-covered armchair and glanced around while I waited. Bookshelves filled one wall of the room, and they were stacked neatly with what were obviously lawbooks. An American flag hung forlornly on a staff in one corner. Near it on the wall was a ridiculous etching of what was supposed to be Pickett's charge. There was another smaller desk, several chairs, and a print of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Between the two big windows at the judge's back was a large frame which contained several paragraphs of printed matter. By peering closely at the heading, I saw that it was Lincoln's farewell at Springfield when he left to assume the presidency.

Judge Crist looked up from the Bible. Instantly he was on his feet, a tall gangling man who moved with awkward swiftness.

"Sam, my boy!" the slow, spaced, kindly voice exclaimed. He put his arms around me in a fatherly gesture. I am almost six feet tall, but he towered over me. "You're a welcome sight, lad, a most welcome sight indeed. My eyes haven't had such a feast since Pa brought home the cream freezer!"

"Thank you, Judge," I said, disengaging myself and grasping the hand he put forth. His voice somehow bothered me. It had always been deeper, more booming. It seemed to me that he was deliberately pitching it high. What for, I wondered.

"Sam, if I'd known it was you coming in, I'd never have put on that act." He grinned and stroked his short beard. "I was busier in that Good Book than a circuit preacher at a baptisin', wasn't I? I thought it was that old coot of a county attorney. I'm going to quote Scripture to him when I tell him he's not going to run for Congress next year. Make him feel better if it's put in the words of the Gospel. Only damn thing I can think of, though, is 'many are called, but few are chosen.' It has to be something better than that." He laughed and I smiled with him. "Wish Robert would take these jobs," he continued in mock sadness. "Here this old man's already got his ticket to Washington bought, and I got to tell him he ain't going."

He clasped his hands behind his back and gazed at me.

"You're thin, boy! But it's fine to see you home again. I sure was surprised to hear you were coming. We mourned for you last year, Sam."

"Thanks, Judge. I'm glad it was wasted effort."

"Well, my boy. This calls for a bit of celebration."

He crossed to the door and turned the key in the lock.

"Man in public office has to watch his step, Sam. Remember that. A celebration, indeed! What's finer for any occasion than a bit of the world's finest whiskey, Highland County apple?"

"Little early in the day, isn't it?" I asked with a smile.

"Give you a good appetite for lunch." He pulled a jug from a deep drawer of his desk. Two glasses appeared from another drawer. He poured the whiskey.

"Your very good health, Mr. Bellnap."

"And yours, Judge Crist."

We drank. I tried to keep from sputtering and choking.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "That's good for a man. Well, I'm glad to see the three sons of my old friend back together. You and Robert and Davey. Your father's death saddened me, Sam. He was a fine man and a good friend."

"He was, Judge."

"Your brother is a boy I'm proud to know also, Sam. And proud to have my daughter wed to him." He peered at me sharply, as if expecting a reaction from me and yet almost pleading that there be none. His voice lost that high pitch and became curiously soft. "They are very happy, Sam. They make a fine couple. I look at Martha sometimes and I'm very thankful to the Lord for His blessings. I remember the old days out at Cedar Bush. Just plain country folks, we were, Sam. Nothing fancy. Yet I wanted that girl to have everything in the world for her own—whatever she wanted!" He paused. "Looks to me like she's got it now, Sam. A fine handsome husband and a beautiful home and position any girl would envy. And a good brother in the bargain, Sam, who's going to see that she's never unhappy. Am I right?"

What did he think I was, a child? I knew the answer he wanted, and I was annoyed that he should ask it from me. So I didn't give it to him. Instead, I remarked casually: "You weren't worried about her, were you, Judge?"

"No, Sam. Not worried. I know the Bellnap boys too well for that. My daughter is happy now, and she's going to stay happy."

I decided it was time to change the subject.

"Look, Judge. I came here because—"

"I know! I know, my boy! We'll get to it. You'll forgive me for rambling on about Martha. One thing more, Sam. Robert's all right. Right as rain. And you have to get up pretty early in the morning to beat him."

"From what I've heard last night and this morning, he's branching out very rapidly."

"Branching is the word. That's the very word! Every time you turn around, Robert has another sound idea for making new dollars out of old ones. And politics! Why, Sam, between him and me—" he paused and paced a couple

of steps, one hand stroking the short black beard and the other held in a closed fist behind his back. The tall, almost gaunt form, the beard, the pacing—all of them at once gave me the reason for the changed voice and the drawling mannerisms. He was imitating Lincoln! I suppressed a laugh. He did look uncommonly like the President. All he needed was a mole on his cheek. He could take the part of Lincoln in a stage play.

"You listen to me, boy." He stopped pacing and turned toward me. I wondered if he had ever split logs up in those Catskill foothills where he had been raised. "All the past is behind us."

Sure, I thought. One or another, your daughter married a Bellnap. Probably the better one at that. So young Sam is supposed to take his beating like a gentleman.

"You throw in with Robert and me, and you'll not have to worry. We have great plans, Sam, and there's no reason why you can't share 'em." He lowered his voice almost to a whisper. "Tell you why old Enright isn't going to be Congressman from this district." He paused and looked dramatically at me. "Because I am, Sam. I'm running for Congress myself."

"Congratulations! Robert has already told me. In fact, he offered me Enright's job. Said the old man was going to retire."

He seemed disgruntled that it was no surprise to me.

"I'm looking forward to it, Sam. Maybe I should have let old Enright have the job for all his hard work in the past, but sometimes a man has to think of himself. Your brother and I, boy, we hold the Republican Party in this county right there." He held up an open palm. "Right there! You put in with us and you'll do all right. You take Enright's job first. You can have this office here in a few years. Just say the word, Sam."

"Wait a minute!" I laughed. "Just as I told Robert, I'm no politician, and I never thought he was."

"Good business," the judge answered. "He had his war contracts to look out for. Besides, he's not the politician in this team. I am. And you will be, when you go in with us."

"No, sir," I answered seriously. "It's not for me. I just want to be a simple lawyer for a long while. I've got to go chasing after four years that dropped out of my life. Maybe I'll do a little writing. And plenty of fishing. There's no room for politics. I've already told Robert that. Let Mr. Enright keep his job if he wants it. I came to see you about something else, Judge. I think Davey and I will be leaving Highland Landing. Since you're the executor of the estate, I want you to argue with Robert about our money. He says he's not going to release it to us if I take Davey away."

"Can't do a thing, Sam. I'm not executor of the new will. Robert is. What he says, goes."

"Do you think I could fight it? I don't know the circumstances—only what Robert told me."

"No, Sam. He's Davey's guardian. I don't think you have a case. So you want to leave, Sam? Why?"

I shrugged and didn't answer.

His voice was kind. "It's my daughter, Sam? You thought she'd be waiting?"

I looked at him steadily. "I thought she would."

He sighed and resumed his pacing. "I thought so, Sam. I could tell as soon as you started talking. Listen a minute. Of course, I'm in no position to tell you what to do, but I'm going to do it, anyway. I know Robert wants you to stay and work with us, but maybe he's wrong, Sam. I agree with you. Leave Highland Landing, Sam, and don't come back until this is all cleared up in your mind. I'm thinking of my daughter's happiness. That's the most important thing in the world to me."

I was suddenly furious. Everyone in this goddamned

town told me what I should do and what I shouldn't. Just as if I were a child. Controlling my temper as well as I could, I was just about to tell him I would do as I damned well pleased. Then there was a soft knock at the door.

"See who that is, will you, Sam?"

I unlocked the door and swung it open, stepping a bit aside. Martha stood there, wrapped in a long blue cape with a peaked hood. Her face glowed from exposure to the brisk wind, and she smiled happily, although when I had left her a couple of hours before she had been sobbing. Now I felt such a quick glow of pleasure just to see her that I knew the judge was right. There'd be trouble if I stayed.

Without looking to see who had opened the door, she exclaimed to her father: "What do you think? Sam's home!"

"Here I am," I said.

She didn't seem surprised to find me in her father's office; it was almost as if she had expected me.

"Oh, Sam. Have you been down to the factory yet?"

"Yes. And to see Uncle Jeff."

"Then that must be your rig tied up outside. I knew it was one of ours. You can give me a ride home."

"Come in, my dear!" the judge called. "What brings you down here? Sam and I were just talking over old times."

"I rode in with Mrs. Armstrong to do some shopping," she answered. "And I wanted to invite you and Mother out to dinner Sunday. We can make it a welcome-home party for Sam."

"Excellent!" the judge beamed. "And the way he's been talking here, we can make it a going-away party, too."

"We don't want him to go, do we, Father?" Her words were spoken softly and they seemed to create a tension among us, and I found myself thinking: Now they're going to talk about it, and I'll have to listen.

For a moment or two I expected the judge to take advan-

tage of this opportunity to pour forth some fatherly advice about the blessed state of marriage and the necessity for letting bygones be bygones.

Instead, he nodded to me and said: "Sam has a pretty good idea of what he wants to do. We had better not interfere."

"You're busy, Father," Martha interrupted. "We won't bother you any longer. Will you come on Sunday?"

"Of course."

"Thanks for the advice about running for office," I said. "I'm sorry I can't follow it."

"I didn't know all the circumstances when I offered it, Sam," he said. "Your own idea is probably better. Drop in to see me any time, Sam."

Martha preceded me through the door.

"Just a minute, Sam," the judge called. "One thing more."

I returned to his desk while Martha waited in the corridor.

"I'm not going to ask you to promise anything," he said quietly. "I know I don't have to. I just wanted to tell you that I think they can be very happy. I hope you agree with me."

"I agree," I said, controlling my anger once more. After all, he knew what was in my mind and he had a right to talk to me like this. "There's no reason why they shouldn't be."

"I'm glad to hear that, Sam. Come in again soon, now."

"I will. I'll be around for a while."

As I left, I wished he had said it the way it should have been said: "Leave her alone and get the hell out fast!"

Martha and I walked to the buggy in silence. I was glad to be out in the cold clear air again. And I was happy to be with her. Too happy.

We had traveled two or three blocks before I spoke: "After lunch, I'm going out to get Davey. This idea of

Robert's that he should be working is nonsense. Besides, I want to spend some time with him."

"He'll like that, Sam."

Again we were silent for a while. She nodded a greeting to someone on the sidewalk. Two women, I thought. From the corner of my eye I could see heads turn to stare after us.

"Sam, are you sure you must leave? This is where you belong. Can't we look at the facts squarely and say that this shouldn't have happened, but it has and nothing can be done about it? That's what you told me this morning. I'm willing to try."

"You offered to run away with me a couple of hours ago," I said, being deliberately sarcastic.

"I was wrong, Sam. You were right. We couldn't do that to Robert. If you insisted, probably I would go with you. I'm glad you were sensible about it. That's why I think you can very well stay here in Highland Landing. We're adults —in time all this will be smoothed out. You'll meet someone, fall in love with her, get married. Stay here, Sam! I want you to."

"No," I said shortly. "It isn't only this marriage. There are many things. You wouldn't understand. You weren't in Andersonville."

"I *do* understand, Sam! This is the place to recover, not away off somewhere among strangers. We all love you. Stay with us."

"No! I'm going, and I'm going to take Davey, if he wants to come."

19.

The river road north of Highland Landing is curved and hilly, sometimes running along the uneven ridge above the Hudson and often dipping down to parallel the railroad tracks and the river. Just outside town there are a few large houses which crest the ridge, asserting proud ownership of the wide bay and the highlands. These give way to a stretch of wooded marshland, in turn succeeded by a flat plain at the river's edge dotted by the gray squares of the shacks where the workers in Peterkin's brickyard live. This is an odd colony: the oldest of the little houses are inhabited by Irish families whom Peterkin had imported soon after he bought the brickyard from my grandfather; another group by Italians who came in the late fifties; still another by several families of Greeks; the remainder by Negroes who had come north for freedom and found another kind of slavery at Peterkin's kilns. The village is properly known as Roseville, more commonly called "Peterkin Flats." On the bluff above looms the baroque castle which Theodore Peterkin started to build in 1845 and never finished.

I drove through the Flats swiftly that day, although it had always been my custom to stop here and there to talk to my friends among the brickyard families, most of whom had always taken their many grievances against the Peterkins to father. I paid but little attention to the flurry of missiles with which the flint-eyed, hard-voiced Flats children greeted everyone who came along the road. They had maintained, ever since I could remember, a kind of one-sided war against the rest of the world. This day it was

snowballs; in the spring and autumn it would be rocks; in summer it would be mud and overripe vegetables.

Now I was through the Flats; the hillside stretched white and bare into the bleak brilliance of the horizon. Puffs of powdery snow skittered through the rail fences and among the naked apple and peach trees of the orchards. The farmhouses I now passed looked forlorn, uninhabited. As I went by I half-expected to see their doors swinging, creaking open to allow the tiny gusts of wind-driven snow to dart into the vacant blackness within. Only the smoke curling from their chimneys when the wind shifted momentarily gave a suggestion of the warmth inside.

I hadn't remembered that it was so far to Crystal Lake. The distance had always seemed to slip away more quickly than it was doing this time, although the bay was a fine horse. Now I watched the constant rippling contraction and expansion of his withers under the harness leather. In my mind I stitched and ripped and stitched again the fabric which this homecoming made.

I can say anything at all about doing the right thing, I thought, and I'll still have to watch myself. Because sooner or later I'll reach the point where everything I taught myself there in the filth and muck of prison will be forgotten.

It's still a long way to that point, I thought. I'm not going to fight him. If I were sure she loved me instead of him, if I had some way to measure the amount of grief which can be contained in ten months' time—then I'd have a reason. I'd be able then to draw a line the way we used to when we were boys. I could scratch the dirt with the toe of my shoe and say: "I dare you!" But I can't do that. There's no provocation. No matter how I look at it, he has right on his side because he's married to her. I can't beat that.

Davey. I will insist on taking him. Surely the things I can teach him are just as important as becoming a Bellnap in the

Highland Landing tradition. Surely Robert can grant me that. He has everything else.

Cutting ice, I thought. A boy barely sixteen. Even if it's just helping with the horses. Doing that when he ought to be in school—not for what they can teach him in mathematics and languages and the rest, but just because of the chance that perhaps one day he might stumble over whatever it is that makes the rest of us what we are, stumble over it and recognize it and so be able to avoid it for all the rest of his life. If it's big enough and plain enough to him, then he might be able to point it out to his children and maybe even all the other children, so that nobody ever again will have to spend six or seven months in Andersonville or whatever they call it the next time.

Instead of that, he's going to be devoted to a lifetime of learning how to put one dollar on another, on and on, until everything is represented by a series of dollar-signs.

It's too late to cut ice anyway for this winter, I told myself. You could expect to have this last freeze in early March, but no more. Seems to me Robert doesn't miss a single bet. I forgot to ask him when he took over the ice business in Highland Landing. There always used to be six or seven ice pedlars around, but maybe Robert's put them all to work for him.

It seemed to me that sometime Robert might forget just how much of the town he really owned or controlled, and then he might spend a whole morning going over the list of deeds and mortgages before he found the one he hadn't remembered—one of the smaller office buildings or maybe a blacksmith shop.

They will have finished lunch by this time, I thought. I'll say: "Come on, Dave. You're finished with all this. You're coming home with me. Then we're going to get ready to go away together. Just you and I."

I'll leave it to him, I told myself. Let him make up his

own mind. If he wants to come, I'll be pleased. Robert won't hold to his threat about the money, and even if he does, it won't matter. We can leave it here for a while for him to take care of. But maybe Davey won't want to go. Maybe he'll want to stay in Highland Landing. It might be that he even likes working for Robert and the business career Robert has laid out for him. Then I'll have to go alone.

I checked the horse and turned into the narrow side road which led to Crystal Lake. It was about a half-mile to the lake through a thickly-wooded area of birches and cedars. The snow of the road was rutted by the passage of several wagons that morning. Just ahead of the buggy a partridge whirred across the road. The bay shied, but calmed in an instant. A couple of gray squirrels squalled from high in a lone hickory tree. Above the muffled thudding of the bay's hooves and the hiss of the buggy's wheels through the light snow, I could hear the steady rasp of saws and the teamsters' shouts in the thin cold air.

They'll be down by the dam at the lower end, I thought. Because of the springs. This late in the year there'll be rotten spots over the springs at this end.

Soon I topped the line of little hills which surrounded the lake. I could look across the tops of the dense cedars and see the snow-covered ice ringed by the rough shore line. The lake was long and narrow. All of it was in view for a moment, and I was surprised to see the men working along the near shore only a few rods from the inlet. I supposed they knew what they were doing, but undoubtedly the best ice was down by the dam.

The road ended in a picnic grove. I tied the horse and walked to the shore. Most of the crew were gathered in one spot where there was a roughly square patch of open water. I saw that they were cutting diagonally toward the shore and toward the inlet. The teams and wagons were

close to the patch of open water. I could see the steam from the horses' breathing spiraling in the air. There were three men walking back and forth in parallel lines, pushing the snow ahead of them with long-bladed wooden scoops. David was one of them.

I stepped down to the shore and walked through the fringe of marshgrass out onto the ice.

"Hello, Davey!" I called.

He looked up, gazed a moment, then waved. "Hi, Sam!"

He dropped his scoop and began to run across the ice toward me, through the clean white expanse of undisturbed snow between me and the wagons.

"Look out for springholes, Dave," I yelled.

He was still running when without even an interruption of his stride he vanished and there was a patch of black roiling water. A scream of terror danced in a thin crescendo somewhere in the space between me and that black water as if it were hanging there on some invisible strand of wire.

I was the first one to reach him, and I pulled him out, but I don't know how I did it. All that is clear to me now is that one instant when he was there and then was not. The rest is a haze of shadows and movements and sounds, as a man can remember the instant he is struck by a bullet, recall it in its tiniest detail, even to feeling the actual sledgehammer blow, and then can remember nothing.

20.

I should have taken him to one of the houses in Peterkin Flats, to strip the frozen clothes from him and let him soak in the heat from a kitchen stove. But it was only two miles farther to our house, so I didn't stop. During that ride I used a whip on a horse for the first time in my life. Davey was bundled in my overcoat and a thick horseblanket from one of the ice wagons; he huddled on the seat beside me, hanging on as the buggy swayed and bounced on the rutted road.

Martha was at the front door, with Ann Bookstaver, as I carried him up the steps. He kept insisting he could walk without aid.

"Fix his bed," I said abruptly.

Without voicing the question which was on her lips and in her eyes, Martha turned and sped up the stairs. The blankets were turned down and she waited beside the bed when I staggered in with Davey.

"Get him some hot tea," I said over my shoulder while I tossed the blanket and overcoat aside and began to rip away his stiff wet clothing.

"Easy, Sam," he said with his teeth clamped to keep them from chattering. "I can get it. Let me alone. I'm all right."

Without bothering to argue, I tore several buttons from his shirt while he struggled with his trousers, and then in one swift tug I removed his underclothes and tossed him into the bed.

"My shoes, Sam!" He was laughing even as he tried to control his shivering. The flesh of his face was pinched and white, and his lips were faint lines of blue.

Impatiently I yanked his sodden shoes from his feet and then tucked the heavy blankets under his chin.

"I'm all right, Sam, I tell you! It was only a ducking!"

"You listen to me, boy," I told him. "If you get out of that bed before I tell you, I'll skin you within an inch of your life."

"Sure, Sam," he grinned. "How come they never made you a sergeant?"

"Never mind me! Of all the damn fool things I ever heard of, cutting ice near springholes! Even if those idiots with you didn't know better, you should have. I've taught you enough about lakes for you to know that, Dave."

"How about the time you were skating out there and you built a fire over a springhole? They brought you home just like me—like a drowned rat, Sam."

"I was a damn fool, too. Now, Davey, you stay under those covers. I'm going to build you the biggest fire in that fireplace that you've ever seen. It'll scorch your feet."

Down the stairs I went as fast as I could go, out to the leanto woodshed beside the stable. There was plenty of wood there. I supposed the coal was in the cellar of the house, but I could make a good fire a lot quicker with the wood. I filled a big wicker basket with kindling and split hickory chunks and took it upstairs.

While I crouched at the fireplace, Davey peered over the edge of his pile of blankets.

"Sam, you know, you shouldn't get angry with Robert about this. He's not to blame. That wasn't his idea for me to be out there at Crystal Lake. I wanted to do it."

"Didn't you like school better, Dave? Don't you want to go to college?"

"Sure I do, Sam. I study here at home, and in a year or two, I'm going to college. Columbia, just like you."

"From now on, you're not going to do any more man's work. I'll have something to say about that."

"But I like it, Sam! Let me tell you, Robert has some very good ideas. You listen to him. And don't go fighting with him!"

"What are you talking about? I'm not going to fight him!"

"You were boiling mad on the way home. Yelling at the horse and yelling at me to keep covered and yelling about what you were going to do to Robert for sending me out there to the lake. It wasn't his fault. Why are you mad at him, Sam?"

I didn't answer him. He waited a moment, then spoke again softly.

"Because of Martha, Sam?"

"No! Don't think that, Dave. It's over and done with."

"I thought it was fine when they got married. I was the best man, Sam. It was a big wedding. Everybody in town was there."

"All right! All right! Stop talking about it!"

"Thought you said you didn't care?"

Just then Martha and Ann came into the room with a large tray which held a big blue teapot and four cups.

"We'll all have some tea," Martha said. "While I'm pouring it, will one of you please tell me what this is all about? What happened to you, Davey?"

"I fell in the lake and Sam thinks Robert pushed me, don't you, Sam?"

"All right, Davey, that's enough!" I said abruptly. "He should never have let you work out there, but you did and that's all. Just you stay in bed for the rest of the day. And there'll be no more ice-cutting!"

"Will you stay here and talk, Sam? I haven't had a chance to talk to you hardly at all."

"Hadn't you better sleep?"

"No. I'd much rather talk to you. It's been such a long time."

"What do you want to talk about? You probably want to know how Grant helped me to win the war."

"Why don't you tell Davey what you're planning to do now that you're home again?" Martha asked.

"Yes," I said, sitting on the edge of the bed. "I guess the first thing you and I are going to do, Davey, is move into town."

"What for, Sam? Martha and Robert would like us to stay here, wouldn't you, Martha?"

"As long as you want to stay," she answered. "It's more your home than it is mine."

"We'll be able to find a good place in town," I said. "For a while, anyway."

"Places are hard to find," Miss Bookstaver said. "I hunted all over town before I got my rooms. Of course, it is a nice place. Maybe you'd do as well."

I wondered if she knew why I wanted to move.

"I'm going away from Highland Landing, Dave."

"Where are you going, Sam? When?"

"I can't tell you when. When I go, it'll be West, probably."

"Why?" he asked. "You always liked it here so well."

I glanced at Martha before replying. She was gazing steadily at me, her eyes narrowed, speculative. She seemed to be waiting for more than an answer to Davey's question, as if I had been talking to her instead of to him, as if I had asked her something and she had already answered and there it rested. Her cheeks were flushed with tiny patches of red and her fingers played with her cup, causing it to make faint clicking sounds on her saucer.

"One hears so much about that great country out there," Miss Bookstaver said musingly. "It's so big and new. I have thought that I might go there some day. There's nothing to hold me here."

I crossed to the old armchair beside the fire. I scarcely heard Miss Bookstaver's words, because I was wondering if this would meet with father's approval, if my decision to change this life for another should include Davey as well. Everything in this room was marked with the sixteen years my brother had lived here—had I any right to take him from it?

"Davey," I said finally. "You want to come with me? Would you like to have a look at what's beyond the Mississippi?"

"Me, Sam! Sure I do! Gosh, I didn't know you were going to take me."

"Robert doesn't want to let you go."

"Let me talk to him," Davey pleaded. "I'll convince him. He'll listen to me, Sam."

"He wants you here, Dave. He told me he'd refuse to give us any money if I took you with me."

David looked puzzled at that, but then he grinned.

"Will we need any money, Sam?"

"Not much."

"All right, then. When are we going?"

"Not for a while yet. First we'll move into town. I want you to think it over carefully."

"Out in the Indian country? Maybe Texas, Sam?"

"Listen, boy. I saw enough Texans in sixty-one, and sixty-two and sixty-three to last me all the rest of my life! I don't care if I never see another man from Texas. Seems to me every time I saw a reb, he was from Texas. They all seemed to think they were in this world for the sole purpose of blowing my head off. Now how do you think they'd take to a couple of Yanks—and the war not even over yet?"

"Where, then?"

"Who knows where we'd like it? We could try it all and see what we like best."

"Indians, Sam! That's what I want to see."

"Drink your tea, Davey," Martha interrupted.

"They have some wonderful names out there, Sam," he murmured. "The sound of them. Abilene, Independence, Virginia City."

"Wherever it is we go, we'll make sure there's good hunting and fishing, and we might get us some land up in the hills and maybe build us a cabin and leave the town every once in a while—"

I talked on for a few moments more, and then Martha rose from her chair and went to the bed. She slid the tilting cup and saucer from David's hand and put it on the tray. Motioning Miss Bookstaver and me toward the door, she went back to him and began rearranging his blankets. As I passed, I saw that his eyes were already closed.

"I'm going to start dinner, Sam. Ann will stay for dinner. Will you drive her in later?" Martha asked as they followed me down the stairs.

I nodded and continued toward the front door, carrying the horseblanket I had wrapped Davey in. I had remembered that the horse and buggy were still standing in the drive before the steps.

The bay looked at me with what might have been reproach. I draped the blanket over his sweated back and then scratched his ears and murmured a few soft words to him. I led him around the house to the stable.

After I had unhitched him from the whiffletree and had unharnessed him, I led him into one of the two stalls and dumped some oats into the trough. I also gave him a little water which he sucked up gratefully. Then I took a rough cloth from the wall of the stable and began to rub his hide briskly. I had run him all the way in from the lake, but he didn't seem to be exhausted. He was a fine horse.

I worked all around him; occasionally he snorted and lifted his head from the trough to turn and watch me for a

moment. Finally I took the heavy horseblanket and covered him with it.

Standing beside him for a little while, I watched him eat. I listened to the rustling of the oats as he plunged his muzzle deeper into them. Overhead I heard the sudden scratching of tiny feet. I looked up and saw a big rat run across one of the beams which stretched between the two small haymows. He paused halfway over, staring down at me for a second or two before scampering into the blackness beyond.

Bold little devil, I thought. In broad daylight. If he'd lived in a reb prison he wouldn't be so careless. He's a big one—would have made a nice meal.

I considered going back to the house for a couple of pistols with which I could wait for him to cross that beam again. I hated rats; had hated them ever since my first burial detail during the war. That had been at Cedar Mountain; for a long time after that I used to awaken at night with the sound of squeaking and scratching in my ears. I decided against the pistols, however, because if I went up to the house, I'd have to talk to Martha.

Our stable was a small one, having room for two carriages or buggies, and stalls for two horses. There was only one light buggy there now, other than the one I had taken from the livery stable. It was dust-covered, shoved back into the shadows, and apparently forgotten. Father's favorite vehicle, a handsome black phaeton with yellow-trimmed wheels, was gone. I supposed Robert had sent it to the livery stable. Years ago, all of us would ride to St. George's in the phaeton every Sunday morning. The two brass carriage lamps which had always adorned it were hanging in dusty disuse beside the doorway. I walked over to them, lifted one and heard the slosh of coal oil. My parents had been proud of them; my grandfather had brought them from Rotterdam on one of his European trips.

On another nail beside them was father's canvas trout creel, also covered with dust and cobwebs. I lifted it from the wall and looked into it. Inside were an old clay pipe with a broken stem, and a small canister of tobacco. The thin line of wax which had sealed the canister was unbroken, and the shagbark tobacco inside, although it was dry, did not crumble. I cupped the pipe between my fingers and packed it loosely. The first puff choked me and I coughed a little, but after that it was quite satisfactory. I perched myself on the workbench near the door and smoked. It was the first pipe I had had since February of 1864. I had almost forgotten how fine it was to smoke a pipe, even when the tobacco was a bit stale.

I watched the slim tendrils of smoke curl from the bowl of the pipe; I sucked the smoke down in long draughts and then expelled it noisily through pursed lips; I took the pipe from my mouth and puffed perfect smoke rings into the still air of the stable.

It was a tranquil moment; this was what I had imagined it would be like—it was for this peace that I had come home.

I had to consider Martha once more, because in my own mind I wasn't quite sure. Did she love me? I was sure she did, and I was also sure that if I asked her to come with me, she would. If I stayed near her, I couldn't keep forever thrusting from my mind the words which I could hear sounding and resounding with mocking insistence: "She's going with you! Take her! You love her!"

I looked up suddenly from the curling smoke. Ann Bookstaver stood in the doorway, wrapped in a dark blue shawl, standing almost wraithlike just inside the shadow. She smiled at me and stood hesitantly as if she thought she were intruding.

"Come in," I said, jumping down from the workbench and crossing to the buggy. "Come in and sit down."

"I've been thinking about your trip west," she said as she

climbed into the buggy. "It sounds so wonderful. Would Davey need a teacher, Sam?"

She was joking, of course. Yet I knew there was a longing in her which her smile could not entirely conceal; instinctively I realized that she was a very lonely woman who thought that in a new, young land she might lose her loneliness and the memories of barren years in the past. She's not forty yet, I thought. She could easily find a husband, have children, begin a new life. I wished that I could help her.

"You'd like to go out there?" I asked. "It seems strange, when you've just come to Highland Landing."

"I know. I thought things would be different here. But I'm beginning to wonder. After all, Gardinerville is only twenty miles away. And I'm afraid that I'm going to be an old maid schoolteacher here. Yet, if I went out West—"

She seemed about to say something else, and I waited. She smiled again, a distant look in her eyes.

"A man once told me about the West, Sam. A very famous man—infamous, some would call him. He'd been all over the country along the Mississippi. Years before I was born he was out there. It was Aaron Burr."

I nodded.

"We were at a dinner together. He was a fascinating man."

"I've heard that he was." I wondered if that had been her closest touch to romantic adventure, a dinner conversation with an old man so noted for his way with women.

She changed the subject suddenly. "Sam, you're in love with Martha, aren't you?"

Her frankness surprised and irritated me. I didn't answer.

"Don't be angry. I know all about the days before the war. After all, I've seen her many times since then and she wrote to me often. I'm sure she loves you, too."

"It's all over," I said shortly. "Let's not talk about it."

"I remember very well the first time I saw her, Sam. Has she ever told you?"

"No."

"I had my school in Gardinerville, teaching farmers' daughters with the marks of the stable still on their clod-hopping shoes. None of them had beauty, talent, ambition. I was amazed one morning to see a slim dark girl no more than twelve years old—the same lithe beauty then that she has now—drive into my yard with her father. He told me I was to teach her everything I knew. She stood there listening with that speculative interest of hers, even seeming to disagree with her little secret smile—you know it, Sam—but she didn't say a word.

"She was far advanced already—her father had done a good job. Not only was she bright, but I discovered something else. She had ambition. I began neglecting the rest of them. They didn't mind. She became more than a student. She was the only friend I had. A little twelve-year-old girl. I used to watch the road from Cedar Bush in the morning, to see her driving that horse and buggy all alone. She was always the last to leave at night. Sometimes she stayed with us.

"She knew what she wanted right from the beginning. Life in Cedar Bush was all prosperous dullness—she wanted to get away from there, to see the life she found in her father's books. She used to tell me, not the way you would expect a child to speak, but as an adult might, that she was determined to have wealth and everything that went with it: a big house with servants, a handsome husband, fine clothes, the company of fashionable people."

Miss Bookstaver's voice became softer, more reminiscent.

"I wanted those things, too, Sam. I always had, even though I knew I would never have them. I think Martha had even decided that her father could not help her get

them. He gave little promise then that he would become one of the prominent men of the county. So she turned to me, almost matter-of-factly. And I was happy that she did; I wanted to help her. I guess I did. I'm sure I had something to do with her becoming Mrs. Robert Bellnap."

She paused, as if waiting for me to interpose some opinion, almost as if she expected me to stop her. I didn't say anything.

"Maybe she had even decided that I could not help her enough, either. She was fourteen then. Her mother and her grandmother protested the waste of time and money in sending her to Gardinerville every day. But one day I told her how it could be done. 'You can be a teacher, Martha. That will get you out of here. You can go to New York or Boston or Philadelphia.'

"So she stayed with me until she was seventeen, helping with the school, learning how to teach.

"I suppose there were many young men in Cedar Bush and Gardinerville, Sam, who spent their nights planning her future for her, predicating their chances on the number of cows or pigs they had. She told me about some of them. That smile held them off, I imagine, or maybe the clever phrases which they couldn't understand but vaguely sensed to be some kind of pleasant scorn, if not insult. Sometimes she practiced them on me."

I interrupted then with a slight grin. "I know what you mean."

"I'm sure you do, Sam. Strangely, she never makes you angry when she does it. Well, she told me she had decided to leave Cedar Bush and go to New York when she was eighteen. But then her father was nominated and the campaign started. She waited a while. She saw that he would be elected—she traveled with him and helped write his speeches and watched the crowds. It was part of her education—noting the most minute details of furnishings, clothes,

speech, mannerisms, gestures, everything. Then he was elected and the Crists came to Highland Landing."

"In January of sixty-one," I added.

"Yes. And she met you. I heard all about it, Sam. She wrote me a letter saying she had met the man she would marry. That was the day after the dinner where you met."

She was sure of herself, I thought. I hadn't even asked her yet.

"Now this," Ann Bookstaver said gently. "You come home and find her married to your brother."

I shrugged, as if it were a matter of little moment to me. Curiously, I didn't feel that she was probing too freely into my personal life. As she said, she had had something to do with it.

"She would go with you, Sam, I think. If you asked her."

"No," I answered quickly, somewhat nettled now. "There's nothing between us. Did she tell you to ask me?"

"Of course not, Sam. Forgive me for interfering."

"It's all right," I sighed. "It doesn't make any difference."

"I'm glad you won't ask her, Sam," she said, gently once more. "She'll be happy with Robert in time. She will have everything she ever wanted, and he's a wonderful man. I envy her."

We were silent then for a while. I knocked the clay pipe against the buggy wheel and the bowl snapped off and fell to the floor. Somewhere up in the hayloft the rat scurried across bare boards. My mind seized that tiny diversion. I marveled at his temerity.

After a moment or so I looked up and saw Martha there in the doorway, with only her face in the light. The pale rays of the winter sun probed into the darkness, touching the high-boned cheeks and the calm gray eyes, glinting on the long waves of her black hair. Her wide mouth, the long red bow of her lips, was mobile as always, as if she were still selecting the words which already were being spoken.

"Is she telling you she wants to go out West and fight Indians, Sam?"

"That's what she said," I answered.

"Maybe I will go, sometime," Ann Bookstaver said.

"I want you both to stay here," Martha said. "But right now, I want you to come in for dinner. We're eating early tonight, so Sam can take you in and get you settled, Ann."

21.

Our dinner that evening was a silent affair, excepting Ann Bookstaver's chatter about her new lodging. The only words Martha and I exchanged through the entire meal were requests to pass the salt or the bread or the potatoes. There didn't seem to be anything to say.

The girl who helped Martha with the housework waited on table for us. This was the first time I had seen her. She was a large moon-faced young woman named Cassidy, who I gathered was engaged to one of Sherman's bummers, a sergeant named Meehan. Every time she moved between kitchen and dining room, she asked me another question about the army. One of the first questions was about my rank. After that my opinion didn't seem to be worth very much. Once she asked me who I thought was the best general, and I said I supposed Lee was.

"*Sergeant* Meehan says Sherman is!" she announced haughtily.

"Maybe he is," I answered with a smile. "I've never met him. I waited a long time for him in Georgia, but he never came."

When she left for the evening, she said she was going to hurry home and write to the sergeant and ask him what he thought of General Lee. Her tone implied that when the answer came, I'd find out how stupid I was.

When dinner was finished, I harnessed the bay once more. I carried Ann Bookstaver's trunk and two suitcases down to the buggy. She followed with a couple of hatboxes. It was a quiet drive into town to her rooms on High Street, overlooking the river. I admired the view, as much

of it as I could see in the darkness, and then excused myself to return to see how Davey was. I left her there on the threshold of that cold lonely room. I remember thinking that perhaps she too should get away from the town, even though she'd just arrived. She was probably right—she was destined to be an old maid schoolteacher.

When I arrived home, I went upstairs to David's room. He slept quietly. His face was flushed and dry, and I felt his brow. He wasn't feverish, or at least didn't seem to be, but he twisted and threshed in the big bed, and I had to tuck the blankets around him. His breathing was very labored.

Lighting the lamp on the table beside his bed, I sat in the big armchair and waited for him to awaken.

This room was a record of Davey's life. Mirrored in it were the influences of us all. Centered against one wall was a walnut gun cabinet which father had wanted to discard but which Davey had claimed from the scrapheap. He had painstakingly restored the green felt lining, and in it were displayed his heterogeneous collection of treasures, which differed from father's in one respect: each of Davey's pieces was stamped with authenticity. There were Algonquin Indian arrowheads and war clubs; an ancient corroded Tower musket; several tarnished brass buttons on which this faint legend could be seen—"7 Mass"—(Davey and I had unearthed them down at Temple Hill in 1859; some research had shown them to be from the uniform of the Seventh Massachusetts Infantry of the Continental Line); a gigantic horse pistol with a broken lock which had accompanied Elihu Bellnap to the Plains of Abraham; a brass-bound compass, pocket size, on which was scrolled "Anthony Wayne, 1778."

There were pictures on the walls: David at the age of six, done in oils by Jasper Cropsey—one of the Hudson Valley artists, one of several who made our home their head-

quarters when they were painting Highland Landing scenes; three paintings of plains Indians by George Catlin, who had been a friend of my mother years ago; a pencil sketch I had done of the *Constitution* in action against the *Java*.

There were other things: ship models; his books, which I noted included a new copy of *Business Practice and Theory*, by a gentleman named Algernon Blawford; the head of an eight-point buck I had shot up near Lake Minnewaska; tacked on the wall over his bed was the one thing he had wanted me to send him from the war, a flaming red banner crossed diagonally with blue striping on which was mounted thirteen white stars. I shook my head with a rueful smile as I remembered that day when I had captured that flag.

It was July 3, 1863, on the Union left flank at Gettysburg. We were told to hit the Confederate line under Law. General Kilpatrick ordered a charge which took us through a woodlot, across three stonewalls, each covering a line of rebs. I was just going along for the ride, hoping none of those hillbilly riflemen had me in his sights, when I saw the flag dipping and swerving beyond the third wall as the rebels retreated. They were Mississippi troops. I passed one poor Johnny who had taken a sabre slash across his eyes. He was bleating: "Miss'sippi here! Don't leave me, boys!"

I must have spurred past half the Fifth New York and all of the First Vermont after that colorbearer. I saw that he was wounded; he shuffled along frantically after his fellows. I swung my sabre up, intending to kill him; at the last second I hesitated, and instead sliced savagely into the flagstaff, severed it cleanly, and rode off with the flag streaming in the wind. I believe Kilpatrick mentioned it in his account of the action, saying that it reflected the courage of the Union cavalryman. He couldn't have been more wrong, and he knew it—it was a foolish stunt, because

every squirrel-hunter in the Confederate line was trying to bring me down. The Johnnies loved those flags.

As I sat there looking at the banner, idly wondering about the Mississippi lady who, possibly, had cut up a gown or two to furnish that shimmering silk, Davey awakened and spoke to me.

"Out where the Indians are, Sam? Will we go there?"

Startled, I jumped from the chair.

"How do you feel, Davey? Are you hungry?"

"I feel fine, Sam. I'm a little cold. Is there another blanket?"

I rushed out to the linen closet in the hall and fetched him another blanket.

"Thanks, Sam. I'm not hungry." He gestured toward the Catlin paintings on the wall. "Out there where he painted those, Sam? Will we see Indians like them?"

He seemed happy at my reassurance, and tried to settle himself more comfortably in the bed.

"Don't you want me to get you something to eat?"

"Not now, Sam. When are we going to leave?"

"I guess we may as well go as soon as possible. In a few days. Are you sure you want to come with me, in spite of what Robert says about it?"

"Of course, Sam. Wherever you are, I want to be. And don't worry about what Robert says. He'll get over it. We'll be coming back in a year or two, won't we?"

"Sure," I nodded. "We'll be coming back."

"Tell me some stories about the war, will you, Sam? You were thinking about that flag when I woke up. You've never told me how you got it."

So he wanted me to tell him about the war and about that flag. The two were entirely separated in my mind. One was a lifetime of horror and the other was a few seconds of a kind of sport, a thing which I would never have done a second time and which any other man in the regiment who

didn't have a young brother at home wouldn't have even tried the first time.

"All right," I said. "I'll tell you about the flag. It was the third day of Gettysburg, Davey. We were way out on the left, waiting for the rebs to quit. I didn't want to fight any more; nobody wanted to fight. If they left it to the soldiers, Davey, they would never have any battles—"

So I put the words together, forming a tiny fragment of those three terrible days. I spoke of other engagements, something of camp life, and I gave him a tuneless rendition of the song with which we had often tormented the Georgia guards at Andersonville, a song which was one of the rebel army's favorites:

Just before the battle, the gin'ral heard a sound,
He thought the Yanks was comin', and turned his men around.
He looked up and down the roadway—and what d'ya think he sees?
The Georgia militia, eatin' goober peas!

Then I told him about the hustle and bustle that was wartime Washington, and I described the time I had seen Mr. Lincoln in camp. As I recalled the insignificant incidents of minor skirmishes which the history books would scarcely record, I wondered if sometime I might not write the story of the Fifth New York Volunteer Cavalry. I knew there would be volume after volume of the memoirs of leaders on both sides—surely there would be need of the private soldier's story of the war. I could tell about Andersonville; that history needed to be recorded, if only on the slim chance that other generations would be warned by the horrors we had undergone.

Davey listened quietly, with a soft question here and there. Once Martha came in, insisted that he eat something, then returned with some warm milk and toasted bread for

him. She listened to me also for a little while, and finally suggested that I let him rest.

"Just a little more," Davey asked.

"All right. Five minutes," Martha agreed. "I'll come after you, Sam, if you stay here any longer."

It was not that long before he was sleeping again, restlessly, his face pale against the white pillowslip, breathing harshly through open lips, murmuring now and then words which I could not understand.

Before I blew out the lamp, I bent and kissed his mouth. I would not have done so had he been awake; such a gesture would not have been needed between us. Grown men did not kiss each other in Highland Landing. Now, however, he was just a little boy whom I loved very much.

It wasn't late when I left him—about nine-thirty—but I told myself that I was tired. Probably that was another excuse to avoid talking to Martha. I went to my room. Sometime during the day she or the Cassidy girl had brought me a basketful of kindling and a heaping scuttle of coal. I started a good fire in the fireplace, and then I stripped off my uniform. Rummaging through my closet, I found a woolen bathrobe. Then I sat in a chair by the fire.

Tomorrow, I thought, I would get out the clothes which were packed away. I wondered how badly they would fit. I would be a long time regaining my weight.

The events of that day went through my mind. It seemed hardly possible that I had been home so brief a time. It was all so different from those dreams I'd had in the past several weeks.

I knew why there were so many doubts and indecisions in my mind. Prison had affected all men differently. Many had turned callous and brutal; some had lost their minds—forgetting home and family and sometimes even their own identities; still others had adopted a ruthless and sly selfishness which led them to lie and steal and betray for the

smallest of rewards. In my own case, even many weeks before Bill Andrews had been killed at Millen, my daily existence had been reduced to the fundamentals of simple survival. Curiously enough, I might have avoided the present bitterness had I not been obsessed with that necessity for living from day to day, because many times in the later months of my imprisonment I might have traded a bit of food or a cooking pan for the materials with which to write home—and never had I even considered doing so. The food, the pan, whatever it might be, had always meant that I was one day nearer release. The certain knowledge that Martha was waiting for me, was thinking of me all the time, was the force which sustained me. Even though I might have been so weakened by hunger and sickness that I did not consciously call her to mind for days at a time, nevertheless I knew that my longing to return to her furnished my will to live while others were dying all around.

The memory of how men had died in prison called to my mind a duty which I could not neglect. I had to write to Bill Andrews' parents. My desk furnished the paper, pen, and a bottle of fresh ink which Martha must have supplied when she prepared my room for me.

As I sat there trying to find the right words, my mind went back several months—to the Confederate States Military Prison at Millen, Georgia, in November of 1864.

That morning was cold and gray and the clouds were terraced in dull monotony into the horizon across the pine trees. Our dugout was only fifty yards from the stockade, forty yards from the flimsy fence of lathing which marked the deadline beyond which we dared not pass. Prisoners who crossed the deadline were shot instantly.

I was crouched over the feeble flames of our messfire, nursing it with a wood chip now and then and shielding it with the skirts of my ragged overcoat. Bill stood shivering beside me, always and endlessly gazing into the northern

sky. For fifteen, twenty minutes he would stare and then suddenly he would stop shivering and lift his emaciated arm.

"Look, Sam! There they come!"

And I would glance over the stockade and over the pines and I would see them too, a group of black specks sweeping under the chill grayness of the cloud banks.

"Mallards, Sam," he would say, and I would nod agreement and turn back to the fire.

"Think of it," he would whisper. "Less than an hour ago they were over Sherman's lines. Now they're going even farther south—and in the spring they will fly north again, and there's no one to stop them. They're free, Sam!"

"And we'll be free to go north in the spring, Bill," I would answer. "These rebs can't hold out much longer. They're licked, Bill. And we're not. If we just hang on until spring!"

I said the words only to give him heart—he was so thin and so racked with scurvy and dysentery that I knew he would never see the spring. Even as I spoke to him, he was no longer listening; he didn't even know I was there. His body would be turning as the flight of ducks passed high overhead and into the southern sky. He watched until they were long out of sight before he swung around and again scanned that far horizon where Sherman was pounding relentlessly, mercilessly at the belly of the South.

On that November morning a flight of Canadian geese came over in a perfectly aligned V. Their honking came to us, faintly penetrating the constant humming of the prison voices. Bill was quivering with a strange excitement.

"Did you hear it, Sam? Did you?"

"The honking? Sure. We've heard it before. They fly pretty low across here."

"No, no! The sound of their wings, Sam! Didn't you hear it, man?"

And then his voice lapsed into a long eerie burbling, half cry and half sob.

I looked at him in amazement. That was a sound with which I was quite familiar—it came suddenly to a prisoner, sometimes as now, while you spoke to him. And then he might become sullen, morose, or perhaps he would begin to weep, or his mind might seem to collapse, leaving him a senseless heap of shrunken flesh. I jumped quickly to my feet when I heard it from Bill. I was too slow.

With the desperate strength of madness, he had scurried away from me, and now he raced in a stumbling frenzy toward the south side of the stockade, where beyond the distant pinetops the geese had vanished. I couldn't run at all with my bad leg. I watched him fall over the body of a sick man and heard the screams of pain which followed; I saw him scatter a messfire and heard the curses of its owners. And then he was ten yards from the deadline—there came the snapped command from the guardwalk in the stockade: "You man, halt!" He was through the deadline, tearing down the spindly supports, and then he was leaping futilely at the high stockade, ripping the roughly hewn timbers with his fingernails. I saw the rifle come up and the bearded face slide along the stock and the flame leap from the muzzle.

I tried to word the letter as kindly as I could. I didn't tell them all the grim details—there was no need. Instead, I told Bill's parents of our firm friendship, and how he had saved my life by nursing me through that trainride from Richmond to Andersonville. I told them where he was buried at Millen, and said that I hoped to visit Oneonta to see them some day.

Bill Andrews had died, and I had lived to come home. I knew now, however, after only one day at home, that I had not come through scot-free. The shock of losing Martha was only now beginning to be felt completely. I was wor-

ried about the effect it might have on me. How far had my experiences in Andersonville and other rebel prisons eaten into my honesty, my courage—fundamentally, my sense of right and wrong? If she were to be with me for a considerable time, if I were to think of taking advantage of whatever obligation it was she felt towards me, would the weakness prison had stamped in me impel me to yield? If the hitherto controlled conflict between Robert and me broke to the surface, how strong would I find that vow which I had made during those terrible months, the vow that never again so long as I lived would I raise my hand in anger against any man for any reason whatsoever?

While I pondered these things, I renewed my decision to leave as quickly as possible. I even considered the possibility of returning to Highland Landing one day. Certainly Davey would want to come home. Finally I fell asleep in the chair, thinking of Martha.

Perhaps I called to her in my sleep, or it might have been the old prison habit of shouting, screaming during a dream. Whatever it was, when I awakened she was standing over me, her fingers on my lips.

"What is it, Sam? What's wrong?"

She wore a dressing gown, some shade of blue, and beneath it a nightgown of light blue silk. I could see the pulse in her throat and the swell of her breasts in the thin fabric of the nightgown. Her hair tumbled darkly over her cheeks; it hid her eyes and shadowed her mouth.

"What is it, dear?" she asked again.

I rose abruptly from the chair and crossed into the shadows near my bed. "There's nothing wrong," I said. "Just old dreams."

There was a long silence and then she said: "I'm so very sorry I've failed you, Sam."

"I'm beginning to understand," I told her softly. "Only I'll have to leave sooner than I thought. I can't be near you all the time. Not like this."

"I know what you've thought about me since last night, Sam. It's been in your eyes, your voice. But you're wrong."

"How am I wrong?"

"Because you couldn't realize that people go on living after someone they love dies. You were dead, darling. I *knew* you were dead! Should I have died, too?"

"No, you married my brother after a reasonable mourning period."

"You think I married him because of the money, because of who he was! I know you do, Sam, because you remember the country girl whom you met and fell in love with four years ago. But it isn't true! Think about it, Sam. I had all my life to live, and I didn't want to spend it in loneliness. So I married the man who loved me."

"Ten months later," I said.

"Time didn't mean anything. Not when I had recovered from the shock of losing you. It's all been a mistake which nothing can correct. Not even going away with you would correct it. There's nothing to be done."

"No," I whispered, not daring to look at her in the firelight. "Nothing."

A moment later there was a fumbling knock on the door and I heard Davey's voice.

"Sam! Where are you, Sam!"

When I reached the door, he stood there wavering in the darkness.

"I think I'm pretty sick, Sam." The words were faint; I could scarcely hear them.

Then he swayed and fell, and I caught him. His naked body was feverish, and yet he was shivering as if he had been out in the cold wind.

"It's hard to think straight, Sam," he mumbled. "Why is it so cold? Isn't it springtime?"

I carried him back to his bed and left Martha with him while I went for the doctor.

22.

"Of course he's sick!" Doctor Byrnes exclaimed when I finally roused him from sleep. "You'd be sick too if you went swimming in Crystal Lake this time of year!"

"Are you coming out to look at him?" I asked.

"I suppose I have to. Don't get half enough sleep; might as well not get any. Wait till I get my trousers on. You want a drink, Sam?"

"Not now."

"Take one, goddamit! There's the cabinet over there. I keep all kinds of whiskey now and never touch a drop! Haven't had any since Robert sent me to that cure place. Best thing that ever happened to me."

He wheezed up the stairs. I could hear him puttering around up there. He was taking his own time--I wanted to yell to him to hurry, but I restrained myself. I poured a couple of ounces of applejack instead.

"What did you do for him?" he shouted down the stairs.

As I answered, I wondered if there were anyone else in the house. His wife had died years ago. Probably the Negro I had seen driving the phaeton was his housekeeper as well. If so, he wasn't getting any sleep at all with the noise the doctor was making.

"You give him any whiskey?" he yelled.

"No, I didn't."

"Should have. Pour it into him. Best thing in the world for it."

"For what, Doc?" I called.

"Pneumonia, goddamit! What did you think he's coming down with? The French disease?"

That's what I had feared he would say. Of course, I had recognized the symptoms, but I wouldn't let myself admit it.

Doctor Byrnes came down the stairs with his sealskin cap on his head and his coat over his arm.

"Have your drink?"

I nodded.

"Have another? No? Then help me on with my coat."

We left the house and I almost pushed him along the slippery sidewalk and up into the buggy. When we were seated, he touched my arm gently with his fingers. "You get a grip on yourself, Sam. This is likely to be pretty bad. They usually are."

"I know, Doc," I answered. "I saw it many times in the army."

The bay horse raced through the streets back to the house. I left him hitched to the buggy in the stable, and ran up the back walk to the house. I was close behind the doctor when he reached David's room.

He poked and tapped at the boy's chest for an unbearably long time. Then he pulled his wooden stethoscope from his bag and listened. Davey was quiet now; his eyes were clear and he even smiled a bit.

"You like whiskey?" the doctor yelled, as if David were a bit deaf.

"No," was the whispered reply.

"Too bad. Shame to waste good whiskey on somebody who doesn't like it." Doc Byrnes turned to Martha and me. "Give him all he'll take. If he spews it up, wait a while, give him some more. Got any flaxseed?"

"I think so," Martha answered.

"If you haven't, get some. Make a poultice and keep it

on him. Keep it warm—change it every time it gets cold. Don't let him kick the covers off. Stay with him."

"What is it, Doctor?" Martha asked. I'm sure she knew the answer as well as I had known.

"What is it! It's a dozen things—shock, exposure, a couple of damn fool brothers or whoever let him fall in that lake! And it'll probably be pneumonia in the morning. It is now—but I can't tell yet how bad it's going to be. I don't want to fool you. I've known you all too long for that. I owe something to this family. You know I'm going to do the best I can, but thin as he is, I'm afraid we're in for trouble. Now you can take me home again, Samuel!"

"Can't you stay here with him?" Martha asked.

The doctor puffed and snorted before replying.

"Who would take care of my patients? Anyway, I'm not much good at praying. That's about the only thing will do any good at this stage. Just wait and see, that's all I can tell you. Come on, Sam," he said wearily with a last glance at Davey, who seemed to be sleeping again. "Go downstairs and get the whiskey for him. Then you can take me home."

At the door he turned and smiled kindly at Martha.

"Good night. I'll be in first thing in the morning. In the meantime, you get somebody here to help you."

I took the doctor home. When I returned, I spent the rest of the night at Davey's bedside. He slept fitfully; his breathing was harsh; he cried out several times. I built the fire up to the point where the room was uncomfortable for me, and each time he awakened I forced rye whiskey into him. For a couple of hours he remained alert enough to joke about the whiskey, but toward morning he was sleeping most of the time.

Martha was in and out of the room throughout the night, changing the poultice and occasionally wiping the heavy perspiration from his body.

Sometimes she paused by my chair to take my hand.

Once she bent over my hair and whispered: "We both love him, Sam. We'll help him get well."

David was more quiet when the sun came up. I left him then to shave and dress and have some breakfast. Martha had coffee with me.

"Get some sleep, Sam dear. I'll stay with him," she said.

"No, not yet. You'll need someone to help you. I'll take the buggy and go get Mrs. Malloy. Do you know where she's living?"

"Out on the Roseville road. I don't know where it is exactly. Robert's been out there, though. Somewhere just beyond the Flats."

I had little trouble locating the Malloys. All I had to do was stop in Peterkin Flats and ask one of my Irish friends. They all knew the Malloys.

As I had imagined, they had a fruit farm and garden, about thirty acres. It was just what Jim had always talked about.

I knocked on the door of the stone farmhouse, and Mrs. Malloy answered it. I thought she was going to faint when she saw me standing there. She uttered a shrill cry and retreated from the doorway. A few words convinced her that I was no ghost.

"Samuel Bellnap, don't you ever frighten an old woman like that again! After all the prayers I said for the repose of your soul, then you do like that! I thought that you had risen from the dead. Sam dear, I thank the good Lord that I'm alive to see you home again!"

I didn't interrupt her flood of welcome for a few moments. Her husband came in while she was talking. He greeted me warmly, but did not seem so astonished to see me.

"I told her, Sam, that I saw you go by here lickety-split in a buggy yesterday. I said it was a fellow in a soldier suit that if he wasn't you, he was your twin, but she said I was

seeing things. Wouldn't even let me drive down to your house to ask."

"It's a mighty fine thing for you to remember us, Sam, and come out to see us like this," Mrs. Malloy interrupted. "We were so broken up about you dying in the war. I cried for weeks on end, and I had Father McMahon say five Masses for your soul. Then poor Mr. Bellnap passing away right after! Him I knew for thirty years! It's his doing, and Robert's, that we have this fine little place. But 'tis a pity I'm not home with you to take care of you. You're so thin and wasted looking."

"That's the reason I rushed out here this morning. We need you at home."

She smiled broadly. "We hadn't thought of going back to work, Sam, but if you want us, we're ready. Aren't we, James?"

"Willing to go for a while, anyway," Jim answered.

"No, it's more than that," I said. "Davey's sick and Martha can't do everything. She has a girl from town, but I don't think she's worth much. Will you come?"

"What's wrong with Davey?" she asked anxiously.

"Pneumonia, Doctor Byrnes says."

"Ah, that terrible thing!" She erupted into a flurry of motion, grabbing her coat and bonnet and several sacks all at once, into which she began cramming food and medical supplies and I know not what all else. "Get a bag packed, James! Get my night things! Put in my rosary! Why didn't you tell me this five minutes ago, Sam?"

"He tried to!" Jim shouted from another room. "You talk too much. Where's your slippers?"

"Men!" she snorted. "Under the bed! Where would they be?"

"I'll come too, for the fires and such, Sam," Jim called.

"Thanks, Jim. Robert's away on a business trip, so you will help a lot. I'd appreciate your coming for a couple of

days, until he's over the worst of it. I'm sure you'd both help him just by being there."

"Of course, Sam," she answered. "I'll stay till he's up and on his feet again."

They were packed and ready to leave in a few moments. She rode with me and Jim drove his own buggy behind us. For the fourth time in two days that bay horse pounded along the Roseville road.

Mrs. Malloy kept up a running account of things which had happened since I'd been gone. Only once did she mention my return.

"Any trouble between you and Robert?"

"No," I answered, turning to look at her. "Why should there be?"

"Don't come any high-and-mighty on me, Sam Bellnap! If somebody married my girl while I was off getting killed, I'd be boiling about it!"

Through the rest of the day Martha and I stayed in Davey's room. Mrs. Malloy took over the rest of the house, giving stern orders to the frightened Miss Cassidy, preparing what little food we wanted, helping the doctor, doing the thousand things she had done so well all her life. It was she who managed to force a bowl of broth into Davey.

Doctor Byrnes was in and out several times, but all he had to tell us was: "What can I do? I'm only an old doctor who has lived longer than I deserve. This thing always licks us, Sam, if it has a mind to. You know that. You saw it in the army. Just wait. If I could take his place there on the bed, I'd do it. I know you'd do it, too. But all we can do is wait and see. Wait and see."

23.

David had passed into an almost constant delirium by evening. From time to time he would lift himself in the bed and struggle violently. He seemed to be reliving that plunge into Crystal Lake. I had to hold him down and try to soothe him, to still the whimpering which strangled deep in his throat as if he were really going under that icy water. All through the day his slim form had curled and tossed in the bed, and most of the time his fearful whimpering filled the room. I was exhausted by evening. My arms ached from holding him; my throat was dry and sore from talking to him all day long. It was a terrible fever. I was sure it would kill him soon. Each time he shivered and writhed in the grip of the chills which seized him, I thought he would die within the hour.

Still it went on. His delirium relaxed less frequently. I feared that his strangled cries would drive me insane.

During the afternoon, every time I had tried to make Davey take a drink of whiskey, I had taken one myself. I might as well have been drinking water. The whiskey had no effect at all. I slept for an hour after dinner. I was very tired. Davey's shouts awakened me from sleep. Martha already had him quieted when I reached his room.

"His fever is the highest it's been, Sam. He's burning up. Can you get the doctor again?"

"I'll send Jim Malloy."

"You can't. I've already sent him out—while you were sleeping. He's gone to see Simpson, Robert's clerk, to find out at which hotel Robert is staying in New York. Simpson

must know. I never thought to ask Robert. He'd better come home."

"All right," I said. "I'll go for the doctor myself."

Once more I harnessed the bay and started for the doctor's house. As I drove along the dark streets, some of my fear for Davey seemed to dissipate as I remembered Martha's calm competence in the past twenty-four hours. He was getting the best care from her that anyone could have. Surely it would have some effect.

There were no lights in any of the doctor's windows, but a small lamp was burning beside the recessed doorway. I thumped the knocker several times without response before I noticed a small note tacked beside the lamp.

"Anyone with an emergency will find me at Vincent's saloon. A. S. Byrnes, M.D."

I swore loudly. The words carried in the darkness. Doc had fallen from grace! He'd be drunk as an army sutler on a Saturday night! I ran from the porch and jumped into the buggy again, starting the horse for Billy Vincent's tavern on Hudson Street, not far from the railroad station.

It was a neat little barroom, catering mostly to the Irish who had gathered in considerable numbers in the tenement buildings near the railroad tracks in the section of town just south of "the Landing" and usually known as "Under-the-Bluff." I had often had a glass of beer in Billy Vincent's on summer nights. Many a night I had seen Doc Byrnes there in his drinking days. Now I'd find him sprawled across the bar! I was sure of it.

His phaeton was out front when I arrived. The Negro driver was huddled in a robe on the front seat.

"Doc inside?" I called.

"Yessir. He's in there, all right. Been there for two hours."

Long enough to give him a skinful, I thought. Apprehensively, I opened the door. The only patrons were two

obviously liquored soldiers who were arguing loudly while Billy Vincent tried to quiet them. He turned his usually cheerful face to the door when I opened it. He looked hopeless, exasperated, and sad, all at the same time.

"Hello, Sam," he said, laconically. "Heard you'd come home. See if you can do anything with these two, will you?"

They paid no attention to his words.

"Where's Doc, Billy?" I asked.

"Upstairs," he said with an anxious glance toward the stairs to his living quarters above the saloon.

"Already!"

"What d'ya mean, already! He's been up there two hours, and I ain't heard nothing yet. It's got me worried."

"He's probably sleeping it off," I ventured.

"Jesus, I hope he ain't sleeping! There must be something he can do!"

"I was afraid he'd be in bad shape," I said with a sigh. "I need him, too."

"Bad shape! What are you talking about? He's been trying to get my wife to give birth, but she's as damn stubborn as her mother."

I was so relieved I started to laugh. "I thought he was drunk!"

"Maybe it'd help if he was," Billy grumbled. "Have a drink, Sam. Honor of your return, honor of my son or daughter or whatever they're taking so goddam long about."

The soldiers were staring at us.

"Everybody have another drink!" one of them said, pronouncing the words slowly and carefully.

Billy set up drinks for me and himself, and after a moment's hesitation and a look of distaste, set up two for the soldiers, also.

"Billy, would you go up and see how long Doc's going to be?"

"My mother-in-law won't let me in."

"We need him badly," I urged. "My brother's pretty sick."

"Robert's sick?"

"No, Davey, the younger one."

"All right," he said. "I'll try."

The soldiers were back at their argument, which was concerned with the use of the word "Hurrah!" or "Hooray!" in a song. Finally, as one man, they turned to me.

"Hey, Cavalry," one of them said. "What outfit you in?"

"Fifth New York, First Brigade, Third Division," I answered.

"What th' hell," said the larger of the two, a burly Irishman. "Never heard of 'em. What'd they ever do?"

The other one, a slim dark man, snorted contemptuously: "Nothin'. Army of the Potomac!"

"We was with Sherman!" the first man said. "Lissen, Cavalry, you know *Marchin' Through Georgia?*"

"That's the song you've been singing?"

"Sure. Brand-new. All about us. Goes like this."

I almost covered my ears as his loud unlovely voice began to yell the words.

Hooray! Hooray! We bring the jubilee!
Hooray! Hooray! The flag that sets you free!
So we sang the chorus from Atlanta to the sea,
While-we-were-march-ing-through-Gaw-Jah!

"It's 'Hurrah!', you sunnabitch," said the slim man morosely. "How many times I got to tell ya?"

"Who's a sunnabitch? Me?" the big man shouted. "I'll bust your head open for ya."

"Shut up that noise!" Billy called from the stairs. "Ten minutes, Sam! Doc says the waiting's over."

"Thanks, Billy," I replied, and then turned to the soldiers. "Let's have another, shall we?"

"You buyin'?" the burly one asked suspiciously.

"Sure."

"All right, Cavalry. We'll drink with you."

I poured three drinks from the bottle of rye. The slim man lifted his and looked into it with bloodshot eyes. "To old Cump Sherman!"

"That sunnabitch!" the burly man said in reverent tones.

We drank. Now the whiskey was beginning to catch up with me. One more and I'd begin to think these were life-long friends.

"Anything botherin' you, Cavalry?" the big man asked.

"Nothing here at the moment."

"You're a hero, boy," he told me with alcoholic gravity. "Don't ever forget it! Anything bothers you, just remember what a hero you are. Any sunnabitch says you ain't answers to me. Don't ever forget it. You live in this town?"

I nodded.

"Me and Henshaw here, we live in Kingston. We been discharged already. We're drinking our way home to be heroes. Show everybody in Kingston the wounds we got for 'em in Georgia. Ain't we?"

Henshaw nodded seriously.

"Lissen, Cavalry! We won the goddam war, didn't we?"

I smiled and nodded once more. Not being quite sober, I was ready to admit that the three of us had contributed a great deal to the victory.

"Then let 'em pay us for it! You want a good job—make 'em give it to you. You want a woman—take her. You're a hero, boy. Don't ever forget it!"

Henshaw looked up. "Anybody makes you any trouble, you shoot the sunnabitch! Hear me?"

"Sure," I answered.

"Jus' let me know you want anybody shot, boy!" the big man yelled. He slapped me on the back. "I'll come shoot him for you!" He peered at me seriously. "How these civilians treatin' you?"

"Fine," I said. "Just fine."

"They better, the bastards! You did their fightin' for 'em, boy. Don't let any sunnabitch put anything over on you. Make 'em pay!"

"Sure," I told him. "We're all heroes."

"Goddam right!" Henshaw muttered. "Come home and live offa fat o' the land. Won the war, didn't we?"

He glared at me belligerently, as if I had denied it.

"Cavalry's all right," the big fellow said. "He'll make 'em treat him like a hero. Won't nobody put nothin' over on Cavalry."

Henshaw glared at him. "You, you bastard! You don't even know *Marchin' Through Georgia* and they wrote it about you! You're stupid!"

They were lacing into their argument once more when Doc came down the stairs.

"All right, Sam. Let's go. Billy's got himself a boy."

The whiskey I'd had that afternoon and the drinks in Billy Vincent's place must have put a bit of rubber in my legs. When we stood at the curb beside Doc's phaeton, he spoke carefully without looking at me.

"That won't keep you going, Sam. You'd better slow up."

"I know what I'm doing," I answered brusquely.

"Sure. So did I a long time ago." He changed the subject easily. "Who were your friends, Sam? Highland Landing boys?"

"No, from Kingston. They were telling me what a hero I was. Said the folks at home should give me everything I ask for."

"Dunno but what they're right, Sam. You all did a good job. You ought to be paid for it."

"Not many did any more than they had to, Doc," I answered. "Follow me in the phaeton, will you?"

"Sure. Go ahead, Sam."

24.

Doctor Byrnes's minute examination of David lasted several minutes. Then he called me out to the hall.

"Samuel, we're absolutely helpless," he said softly. "You can expect him to continue like this for a while. I can't tell you how long it will be. Then, if we have a miracle— I wouldn't say this to everybody, Sam, but I've known you all for years. The boy is so weak that I'm afraid he's going. I don't know anything we can do. I'd give my life to help him, but I can't. Just keep on with what you've been doing. Try to keep him from struggling. Calm him, let him know it's you with him. All your love can help him if he knows he has it. I'm not much good at praying, Sam, but maybe you are. I've seen cases like this where prayer was the only thing left. I'm not the one to say it didn't work."

Martha was in the doorway listening to him. I couldn't speak.

"Anything at all, Doctor!" she pleaded. "We'll do anything you say."

He shook his head. "Not with this. I can't even stay here. I've got a dozen other patients waiting. They deserve my time as much as you do. Where's Robert? I haven't seen him here at all."

"In New York," Martha answered.

"Get him home! Use the telegraph."

"I've sent Mr. Malloy to take care of it," Martha said.

"The sooner the better. He should be here now."

When he left, I took another bottle up to Davey's room. I drank a good part of it. I must have been getting drunk, because Martha tried to stop me. She picked up the bottle.

"Is this doing Davey any good, Sam?"

"Put it back!" I told her. "Nothing can do him any good. Didn't you hear? Maybe you believe in miracles."

"Suppose he wakes up and wants you?"

"I'll be here. Put the bottle down."

"Whom are you fighting, Sam? Yourself? Me? Robert?"

"I'm through with fighting. I'll never fight again."

"But you are now, Sam. You're trying to fight with this stuff. Maybe you can't stand seeing him there in such torture. But you must! You're the one he needs. Fight for him, Sam! Be ready to help him when he calls for you."

I didn't answer her. But I didn't touch the bottle again that night.

So the time went on. I am sure that the awful memory of such hours can never be allayed by all the years a man might live.

He seemed to improve slightly as the night passed. His delirious thrashings waxed and waned; at times he was quite coherent, and weak as he was, he smiled at Martha and me and spoke a few scarcely audible words to us. Then he closed his eyes once more.

In those moments when he was resting more quietly, I can remember weeping with my head in my folded arms, while my mind snatched at whatever fragments of prayers it could recall. I offered them brokenly for my brother's life. In a sudden frenzy, I wanted to bargain. If Davey were allowed to live, then I would kill myself in exchange. If he died, then someone was going to pay for it. It wasn't only the whiskey; sometime during that night I became quite demented. I nurtured that thought of making someone pay for this. It throbbed unceasingly in my brain. Who would pay? Who had sent him out there to work? Who was the money-grubber who'd set a boy to work gathering in the dollars for him? These things, and this: who had stolen Martha from me?

There wasn't any excuse for me. The only answer I can give is that I must have succumbed sometime in the past several months to the most evil affliction of prison—the peculiar derangement, sometimes permanent, which so twisted a man's mind that he imagined his dearest friend was a vicious enemy. That night at David's bedside, I began to hate my elder brother.

Robert did not deserve to live if Davey had to die. Those words raged in my mind. I repeated them savagely. Gone were my prayers, my supplications.

If he dies, I told myself, I'll kill Robert. I'll kill him with my two hands!

As the night passed, my mind and body were reaching the limits of their endurance. Some of the time Martha was with me, calmly and quietly helping me to keep Davey still.

His fever now rose again steadily. His breathing was a harsh uneven rattle which seemed at times so terrible as to mean his death.

For a half-hour at a time he would toss in agony, even more ugly than before since he could have no knowledge that it gripped him. Sometimes I recognized the words he shouted. He called for father or mother or for me. Often his eyes were open, yet he seemed not to see. Sometimes he recognized my voice, for I saw him reaching to me, and yet he seemed not to realize that I was so near, that I was holding him and stroking his poor body. I could scarcely stand hearing him call for me in that strangled rasp as if I were far off across the widest expanse of space and time, while I knelt there holding his shaking shoulders and answering his call.

Not once did he mention Robert's name, yet I could distinguish words which meant only that he was talking to Robert about me. I heard the words rise from that gasping and coughing, sobbing desperately for assurance that I

was alive, then quieting for a second or two as if listening to an answer, and finally once again beseeching me to come to him. I remember, and I am ashamed, how I took a grim joy in the fact that he never called for Robert.

He seemed so bad by sunrise that I was awaiting his death with a kind of quiet terror. However, when Dr. Byrnes arrived he did nothing but look at the boy once more.

"We'll soon know now," he said. "A matter of a few hours. Did you get Robert?"

"Not yet," Martha answered. "There's been no word from him."

"We'll just wait a while longer, now," the doctor said kindly. "You two try to get a couple of hours' sleep. Sam, you get some rest. You look like Vicksburg after Grant got through with it."

"I'm all right," I answered. "I'll stay right here."

"Just lie down, Sam," Martha said. "You needn't sleep. Just lie on your bed for a while."

I agreed to do that, intending to go back to Davey in ten or fifteen minutes. Instead, it was noon when I awakened. I looked into Davey's room. Martha was sitting at the bedside with her eyes closed. The doctor was gone. I went downstairs to get some food.

There were several other women there with Mrs. Malloy and the Cassidy girl. Mrs. Crist and Mrs. Colden were walking about on tiptoe, and Mrs. Imbrie, the minister's wife, was talking and drinking tea with Mrs. Armstrong from next door. There were two or three others, new neighbors presumably, whom I didn't recognize.

"How is he, Sam?" Mrs. Malloy asked. Jim stood in the kitchen doorway, his face anxious and tired looking.

"I don't know," I said. "Bad, I guess. But he's quiet now." I was thankful that the others didn't crowd around with offerings of their sorrow. I knew they had come to help,

but I didn't want to talk. I nodded dully to them. "I think he's pretty bad," I repeated.

Mrs. Colden made a clucking sound. "You know what they always say," she remarked, trying, I suppose, to cheer me up. "It's always darkest just before dawn, Sam."

I nodded again. "Yes. Yes, it is."

"Can I fix you something?" Mrs. Malloy asked.

"Whatever you have," I replied. "Anything at all, and then I'll go up. Martha needs some food and a rest."

"She didn't sleep at all," her mother said. She moved to my side. "I'm glad to see you, Sam, even if it is a sad homecoming for you."

"How are you, Mrs. Crist?" I managed a smile.

Mrs. Malloy brought some food to me and I ate it hurriedly.

Upstairs again, I found Martha asleep in her chair. I picked her up and held her in my arms until she opened her eyes. I brushed my lips against her hair.

"Go get some rest now," I whispered.

She left the room slowly, as if she were already sleeping again. I closed the door and turned to find Davey watching me. I took heart from his smile.

"You love her?" I could scarcely hear the words.

"Yes, Dave. I always have."

"I knew it. You can't hide things, Sam." His eyes closed again for a time.

Soon the whisper came again above the labored breathing. "When I get well, we can go?"

"We'll go, Davey. You and I," I answered, blinking to keep back my tears, but he noticed them.

"Don't cry, Sam. I'll be all right." Then he was silent again.

Soon I noticed that his torment seemed to ease a little. His breathing was fainter now, just a rattle somewhere in his chest. Once more he opened his eyes. They were bright

and clear for an instant. His words were surprisingly audible as he repeated an ancient jest of father's, a question which had been asked a thousand times. Each time, for no reason anyone ever knew, it was cause for laughter to all of us: "Sam, did you ever catch a mullet?"

His lips curled in a little smile. His eyes closed. I think he slept for a while. Perhaps I did also. A prolonged spasm of strangled coughing brought me to my feet. The fever had returned in all its consuming fury. His eyes were glazed and his face was twisted with pain as he writhed on the bed.

He was trying desperately to suck air into his lungs. Vaguely I heard him screaming as I struggled to hold him down. His body was wet and he shivered violently. Suddenly his entire body stiffened with a great gasp. I hurled myself upon the bed, my head buried beside his, my arms around his shoulders, calling him back: "Davey! Davey! Don't go, boy! My God, little Dave, stay with me!"

My words were lost. He was dead.

25.

They found me there beside him. I cannot remember that, nor any of the rest of the day. I must have been there for hours, because I do remember someone—Martha, Mrs. Malloy—coming in to light the gas lamp on the wall. Others came in, spoke to me, but I would not leave him. I heard a voice asking about Robert, and another voice replying that nothing had been heard, that he must have gone to Boston. Perhaps it was I who asked the question. I don't know. Finally I fell asleep.

When I awakened, it was morning, and I was in my own bed. It was a few seconds before I remembered. Then I lay there for a long time, recalling what I had promised myself. Even in the bright morning, it seemed logical that Robert should pay for Davey's death. For the rest of it, as well.

I wondered if he had come home yet. How would I kill him? With a gun? With my hands? I suppose I was rational enough to realize that I was too weak for anything but a gun.

There was a knock at the door. I didn't answer. The knock came again.

"Mister Bellnap. You awake?" It was Miss Cassidy's voice. "Miz' Bellnap wants to know if you want breakfast."

"No."

I thought she had left, and then she said: "You sure you don't want anything?"

"Wait," I called. I rose and put on my robe. I opened the door. "Go down to the cellar and get me a bottle of applejack, will you? It's under the stairs."

She stared at me puzzledly.

"Don't you know where to find it?" I asked.

"In the morning?"

I nodded.

She shrugged and turned away. Then she looked back and said gently: "I'm awful sorry, Mr. Bellnap."

"Thank you."

Most of that day I spent sipping applejack and staring out the window. Mrs. Malloy came up and insisted on building a fire for me. She looked at the whiskey disapprovingly, but didn't say anything. Indeed, she could hardly speak, she was crying so. Before she left, she put her arms about me and kissed me.

Martha came to the door a couple of times and asked me if I was coming down to greet callers. I refused each time, and she left after asking if I wanted food.

Most of the time the house was silent. Yet I could hear voices, words which were whispered softly, which called to me from far away:

"You take care of Davey, Sam. Some day he'll need you. . . ."

"Sam, don't forget. Capture me a flag. . . ."

"Martha. She's my wife, Sam. . . ."

"Oh, Sam, dearest! I'm not ashamed and I'll never be afraid. . . ."

The knowledge that I was going to kill my brother seemed to be a sound also. It boomed in the silence with the methodical regularity of a battery of mortars.

Again Martha came to the door and knocked, telling me that there were friends downstairs who were asking for me. Once more I refused and she went away. I called for the Cassidy girl again and sent her for another bottle of applejack.

Now I lay on my bed, staring at the ceiling.

I could imagine them down there, whispering: "Sam

is taking it hard . . . won't talk to anyone . . . they say he's out of his mind, kind of . . . only the good die young . . . they say he suffered terribly . . . Martha is a lucky girl, isn't she? . . . richest man in town, you know . . . Davey used to play with my Charles . . . such a handsome boy. It's a shame the Lord doesn't see fit to spare us the finest. . . ."

Early that evening Mrs. Malloy came up with coffee; I opened the door for her and asked if she would unpack some suitable clothes for me.

"You're drunk, Sam," she said in a voice which was quite gentle.

"Suppose I am?"

"It's not right, boy. Not with such sorrow in the house and Martha all alone."

"I'll do as I please."

She didn't answer, but went rummaging in the closet for my clothes. She found a black suit I had forgotten I owned. She took it downstairs to press it.

The whiskey put me to sleep. It was very late when I awakened to see Martha in the doorway, holding a kerosene lamp. The house was silent. She was wearing the blue dressing gown again. Entering the room, she placed the lamp on the table beside my bed.

"There's been no word from Robert. Simpson thinks he went on to Boston. We're trying to get him there."

She stood above me looking down. The light from the lamp was reflected on her black hair; her face was partly shadowed and I could not see her eyes.

"I wish that I could tell you how terribly sorry I am, Sam. Is there something, anything, I can do for you?"

It was as if her words had released the anguish within me, because for the first time since Davey died I began to weep. I turned my head into the pillow.

Then she was beside me on the bed; her black hair fell

on my face and across my mouth. She stroked my forehead and ran her cool hand across my cheeks, and for a long time whispered endearments to me while I wept. Then I turned to her. Her body was warm and eager in my arms, she was kissing away my tears, and I was thankful that she had come to me now.

"Sam," she whispered. "I love you so."

Yet I held her there without moving, without even venturing to kiss her, as if she were some fragile thing which would crumble away. This was the same woman I had loved so passionately on that June evening in 1861—she was in my arms again, and yet I was afraid to do more than hold her. Her lips touched my cheek, my eyes, my hair, my mouth. Still I did not move. My eyes were closed, and I tried to keep them closed, to avoid watching the leaping reflections of the lamplight on her throat and in her eyes. My hands could not move to her full breasts or along her lithe body.

The lamp began to sputter and flare. The fuel was almost gone. She rose from my side and I could hear the padding of her slippers on the floor. She blew out the lamp, and then I heard the sibilant rustle of silk. When I opened my eyes, in the firelight I could see her white body, the long thighs and the shadowed outlines of her breasts.

She lay beside me again and whispered: "Take me, Sam. You need me now and I love you."

Then it seemed to be that night at the lake once again. I seemed to be swimming once more in that warm caressing water; it flowed over and around me—in the distance the same storm was rising, because the waves were stronger and I felt them break over me and recede ever more swiftly until the storm came and raged and then passed in an instant.

She murmured then: "Don't ever leave me, darling."

I answered in the same kind of whisper: "I'll take you with me! Wherever I go, I'll take you."

26.

Her tears came later—the quiet sobbing which followed passion, and then the soft words of contrition, when she told me that she realized now that I must go and stay away or else it would happen again and yet again.

"I love you, Sam, but we can't go on like this. Four years ago we lived different lives. Now I feel guilty. We can't let this happen any more. I'm married to Robert, and that's the way it must be."

I listened without answering. I was glad that she couldn't see my face in the dim light. Even the whiskey and my mad scheme for retribution could not still the voice of conscience which told me that she was right. However, the whiskey and the scheming won. After she left me, I lay awake for a long time convincing myself that it was right and just to make him pay for all that had happened to us. I kept drinking. It served to dull the pain, I thought, and the more I drank the clearer became my reasons for killing my brother.

He came home on the morning train the next day. I didn't see either of them all that day. Once Mrs. Malloy came up to my room to tell me that my uncle was downstairs.

"Tell him to go home," I said. "I don't want to see him."

"He says it's important, Sam. Something about his son Joe."

"All right," I answered wearily. "I'll come down."

Uncle Jeff was waiting in the library. He shook my hand and said a few words about his sorrow at David's death.

"Yes," I said abruptly. "Everyone is sorry, but he's dead."

"These are evil times, Sam. The war has put a blight upon the land. Nothing but sickness and death since it started."

Instead of accepting his honest emotion, I nodded impatiently. "You wanted to talk to me about Joe?"

"He's home, Sam. He dropped off a freight train early this morning. Just like you told me, his mind is all twisted. I don't know what to do with him. I wouldn't let him go near the house, where George and Margaret could hear him. He's down at the stable, drinking himself senseless."

"What has he told you?"

"Nothing a sane man would say. He was screaming curses at you and Robert."

I shrugged. "I'm not worried."

"I am, Sam. He has a bottle and a gun."

For some reason that seemed funny to me. That's two of us, I thought. "He'll be all right," I said. "Don't worry too much about him."

"Maybe it's just the drinking. But if he doesn't stop it, I'm going to have him locked up. I already tried to take the gun away from him. He hit me, Sam."

"Perhaps you want me to try? And get shot?"

"You listen to me, Sam! You look as drunk as he is. I don't want my boy in trouble. I know how bad you feel about Davey, but you better sober up and be careful. And tell Robert to be careful, too, for the next few days."

"The hell with Robert!"

"What's wrong with you? Sam, do you think I want my boy to commit a murder? Do you think I want another son hanged?"

I was immediately ashamed of my surliness. "Sure, Uncle Jeff, I'm sorry. Of course I'll tell Robert about it. But don't you worry about us. We can take care of ourselves."

"Good," he said. "I'll try to straighten Joe out, if I can get the gun away from him. If I can't, I guess I'll have to

call the sheriff and have him locked up. I'll see you at the funeral tomorrow, Sam."

"Yes, Uncle Jeff. Will you do me a favor? Send up that chestnut colt tomorrow morning, will you? I want to ride him to the funeral."

"Aren't you riding in the first carriage with Robert and his wife? I've helped Cameron the undertaker with the carriages, and we put you in the first one."

"No. I'm going alone."

"All right, Sam. I'll send the colt up."

When he left, I went to the gun cabinet in the hallway. I found what I sought recessed among the butts of the shotguns and rifles. It was a flat mahogany case. I put it under my arm. In the drawer below I found a cartridge box. Running my index finger across the lid, I traced the outlines of the figures .32 which were burned into the wood.

In my room again, I opened the mahogany case. Resting on the green felt lining were two long-barreled slim target pistols, a perfect pair, identical even in the grain of the light bird's-eye walnut which formed their butts. They had been specially made for me just before the war by a gunsmith on Fulton Street in New York.

I picked up one of them and leveled it. With either of them, at twenty yards I could knock a locust from a tree limb.

I'd told Uncle Jeff I'd warn Robert about Joe Potter, but it wouldn't be necessary. I'd take care of everything myself.

27.

It had started to rain early in the morning, and it continued as we moved slowly along Liberty Street to the cemetery. The rain drove before the wind and bit into my flesh as if I were riding through cedar brush in a storm and the million sharp needles of the cedar limbs were whipping my face. The gray heaps of snow in the streets began to shine as the water sheeted into ice, and when we reached the cemetery I could see icicles begin to glisten on the tasseled iron chain around the Bellnap graves.

Then the rain slackened, and it stopped before all of us were grouped around the grave. The sky remained dark, with the clouds moving swiftly in the wind.

I stood apart from the rest of them, a few feet from the mound of yellow earth and the open pine box in which they had placed the dark mahogany casket. I stared at the box, and I thought that in a year or so the pine would rot and disintegrate and vanish . . . in a few years more the mahogany would begin to soften and crumble. . . .

I looked away, at Robert standing beside the grave, a black cape across his shoulders, his head bowed. I wondered if he were weeping. Moving my left arm slightly across my chest, I could feel the walnut butt of the pistol pressing my left shoulder.

Martha stood beside him, dressed all in black. Her face was drawn by sorrow and she seemed much older, wearier.

I watched the minister conducting the service. He was a young man whom I had never seen before. Reverend Imbrie, the rector, stood beside him, his lips moving in

prayer. For an instant, I felt a wave of pity for the young man. I thought that this was probably the first time for him. He seemed so sincere, so pained, so distraught, that I was glad that he had not yet had my experience with this.

I wondered how long it would be before he realized that this ceremony meant nothing but the continuing of a dull pain, that all the anguish was in the moment of death. He stood with his head held high and his eyes closed. His voice, high-pitched, quavering, gently sincere, was tossed and whipped by the wind so that some of the words seemed whispered and lost. I followed his voice without being aware that I was whispering the words with him. How many times had I heard them said beside other mounds of earth since the summer of 1861:

. . . I will fear no evil; for thou art . . .

The minister lowered his head and looked about him, shielding his book of psalms with his hands against his chest. He began to pray: "Our Father, which art in Heaven . . ."

A low murmur rose from the others, blending with the high thin voice of the minister. I stood silently. The muscles in my throat constricted. My mouth was dry.

Suddenly there was soft sweet singing in the air, young boys' voices muted. I saw that Mr. Winkle was leading the hymn for his small group of students, Davey's friends. Everyone was motionless while they sang.

Now the undertaker's assistants stood near the canvas straps which supported the pine box and casket above the grave, and one of them fitted the lid of the box. Then he passed around its four sides, driving nails to seal it. His blows were swift, expert. When he had finished, his fellows loosed the straps, and the box descended slowly into the grave. Dr. Imbrie tossed a handful of the wet clay into the grave. It hit the box with a dull thud. His brief prayer was scarcely audible.

The others stepped back hesitantly from their positions around the grave, as if they could not believe that this was all, that there was nothing more. Slowly they filed past Martha and Robert—an occasional handshake, a touch of hand on shoulder, a few words of condolence—then they came on to me. I can't remember all of them now: Ann Bookstaver, Mr. and Mrs. Colden, the mayor, neighbors from Grand Avenue, friends of mother and father, some cousins from Poughkeepsie whom I didn't remember well, other relatives from nearby towns in Highland County, many others.

Judge Crist was murmuring solemnities somewhere in the background; Mrs. Crist was weeping; Jim Malloy half-supported, half-carried his wife to their waiting buggy; the minister and Mr. Winkle herded the little group of boys from Clinton Academy.

Martha came to me and spoke softly: "Sam, come home and get some rest now. Ride with us in the carriage."

"No. I won't ride with him."

"He's worried about you, Sam. He says you look ready to collapse."

"Why didn't you tell him what's really wrong? Tell him about the other night!"

Her face whitened, then flushed. "Sam, that's ended!"

"It will never end."

"We can't go on like this."

"We won't. I'll take care of that."

Before she could reply, Robert came toward us and she hurried to meet him. She drew him away to their carriage.

Then all the carriages and covered buggies were gone. I stood there alone. Two cemetery attendants who had been huddled beneath a tree during the burial approached now with long-handled spades. They began stolidly to shovel the lumped yellow clay. One of them was Doc Byrnes' friend, Will Bentley.

I watched them silently until their spades had made a long uneven mound above the level surfaces of the surrounding graves. They turned their tools and started to beat the rough mound smooth.

"Wait a minute, Will," I said. "Wait."

I reached into my trousers pocket and pulled out two greenbacks. "Go have a drink. Come back in half an hour and finish it."

"Sure, Mr. Bellnap," Will said.

They scurried off, headed down Liberty Street toward Vandermark's saloon. I picked up one of the spades and smoothed some of the roughness of the grave.

I stood there longer than a half-hour. The only sounds I heard were the raucous screech of a jay in the trees on the far side of the cemetery, and the frequent clopping of hooves from the Liberty Street pavement.

Somewhere in my mind a gay young voice was calling faintly: "Goodbye, Sam! Don't forget the flag!" Another voice said: "Take care of him, Sam."

I stared down at the raw earth. "Goodbye," I whispered. "Goodbye, little Dave."

My horse, tied to a hitching rail near the gate, was stamping and nickering. I walked over to him and mounted. With one glance backward, I rode him through the open gate.

28.

I rode up the front drive and dismounted. They were having a light supper in the dining room when I entered the hall: my relatives from Poughkeepsie, my mother's brother —Uncle Ned, who had arrived from New York apparently too late for the funeral, my Uncle Jeff, the Coldens, Benjamin Armstrong and his wife (they were our next-door neighbors), the young minister and Reverend Imbrie, Ann Bookstaver, and a few others.

Martha left the table quickly when she heard me in the hall, hurrying to me and speaking in an urgent whisper: "Come in, Sam, and have something to eat. They all want to speak to you. They've been asking where you were."

"Let 'em ask! The hell with them! Send Robert out here."

"He isn't here. He took my mother and father home, and then he's going down to the Landing, to the factory. Why do you want him?"

I turned without answering and strode to the door again. She followed me, pulling on my arm.

"Sam! Don't go!" She was beside me, the huskiness in her voice accentuated—there was fear in it now, and pleading. "Do you want to fight with Robert? Don't do it! Listen to me—if we can't do anything else, I'll go away with you! That's what you want, isn't it? We'll go, Sam—somewhere, anywhere!"

"There won't be any fight," I told her.

We were through the door now, then off the porch. It was raining again. She was still trying to hold me back as I remounted the horse. I knew I had to calm her fear.

"I won't say a word to him about us," I told her. "Don't worry about that."

She called after me again as the horse galloped down the drive, but I didn't turn around.

It was already dusk when I arrived at the factory. The last of the employees were leaving the building. The carriage shed was in the rear of the main building. I left the horse there and entered through the back door. The entire plant was dark excepting Robert's office. There was a lamp burning in there. I walked over to the doorway. I heard a hum of voices within. I loosened the pistol in its holster, and then I opened the door.

It wasn't Robert. Just Simpson the clerk and an old man with a tobacco-stained beard who I imagined was the night watchman.

"Hello, Mr. Bellnap," Simpson said. "What are you doing down here? I'm expecting your brother."

"So am I."

"I'd like to say how sorry I was to hear about David. We all loved him, Mr. Bellnap."

"Thank you."

The old man picked up an unlighted lantern from the floor and started to leave the office. I held my arm before him.

"Wait. Are you two the only ones here?"

"Yessir," the watchman answered. "All the rest of um has gone home. It's after six."

"All right. You two go on home, too. I'll stay here and wait for my brother."

"I'll have to stay," Simpson said diffidently. "He wants to see me, on account of not being here for several days now. He sent word down this morning that I was to wait for him. And Foster here has to stay all night. He's the watchman."

"Never mind. You go home. I'll be responsible. And

you," I said to Foster, "you can take a night off. I'll answer for you."

"I have to make my rounds," he answered stubbornly.

"Get out!" I said sharply. "Both of you! Right now!"

They left without further argument. Simpson seemed troubled, and was about to speak again as he put on his coat, but all he said was, "Good night, Mr. Bellnap."

When they were gone, I stood quite still for a little while, listening. There wasn't a sound in the factory. The only noise I heard was the rhythmic slapping of the Hudson on the dock piling beyond the building.

I walked to Robert's desk and sat in his swivel chair, facing the door. The lamp was on the corner of the desk, between me and the door. I moved it toward me to take its glare from my eyes. My coat I placed on the desk beside the lamp. Then I drew the pistol. Putting it before me, I leaned back in the chair and waited.

The silence was oppressive. I was impatient. Would he never come? I thought of Martha. Whose safety had she been concerned with, mine or his? Or perhaps her own. The security of the Bellnap wealth, the big house, the best people as friends. She might have feared that I would tell him that she had slept with me while he was gone. I didn't believe she had guessed my real reason for coming down here. She thought it would be a quarrel. If she had guessed, it would be easy to stop me. One of the horses there at the house, a brief stop for the sheriff, or the chief of police. Who was the chief? He didn't have much to do in Highland Landing, whoever he was. The county seat had always been the sheriff's town. But I was sure she had imagined only a quarrel.

I knew exactly what I would do. He would walk into the plant and I would hear him coming. He would come to the office immediately, thinking it was Simpson who waited for him. I knew how he'd open the door, quickly, impera-

tively, talking to Simpson even before he was inside. Maybe he'd move a step or two toward me before he realized it wasn't Simpson. He'd stop then. Perhaps say something, a few words. The pistol would be leveled at his chest. I would wait for a few seconds and then kill him.

Now for the first time since Davey's death I experienced a momentary return to sanity. I shivered suddenly, half-rising from the chair. I can't kill my own brother, I thought. What in God's name is wrong with me?

Then my mind leaped once more to the memory of David twisting and screaming as he died and the frenzy gripped me again. I settled back to wait, my mind sick once more with hatred.

The minutes went by, ticking off on the big clock over Simpson's desk. Strange that I hadn't noticed the ticking before. It was very loud now. The flame of the lamp burned steadily. It also made a sound, a tiny whirring in the chimney.

I wished that I had a drink. I'd been drinking all day before the funeral, but I hadn't had anything since. I was almost sober for the first time since Martha had left me two nights ago.

I wondered idly how Robert had managed with only one clerk. There was room only for Simpson here. Perhaps there was another, bigger office in one of the other buildings. All this would belong to Martha now.

The main door opened. Then there were footsteps on on the floor outside. They were heavy steps, slow. They didn't sound like Robert's, but I picked up the pistol, held it ready. The office door swung toward me.

"Sorry I'm late, Robert, but that new horse I got has been kicking the stable all to hell—"

It was Flanagan, the drayman. He'd kept talking because the light was in his eyes. Now he stood there with a ludicrous smile on his face, staring at the pistol.

"What's this?" he cried. "Don't point that thing at me! Is it loaded, for God's sake?"

"Shut the door," I commanded. "Come in and sit down. Right over there."

"Look here, Mr. Bellnap. I don't know what this is, but I wish you'd put that gun away. I'm afraid of guns. I had a brother killed hisself—"

"Sit down!" I exclaimed, pointing with the gun barrel at Simpson's chair. "And stay there."

He crossed the room quickly, seating himself very gently, almost apologetically, as if I might shoot him for no reason at all. He put his fat hands on his thighs, patting them in a constant nervous motion.

He began to speak, stuttering: "What—what—I mean—why—?"

"Easy, Flanagan. Don't get excited. This isn't for you."

"Look here, Mr. Bellnap. I came down here to see your brother like he said. I don't want to get mixed up in anything."

"You're in it already," I told him. "I can't let you go to warn him. No, Flanagan, you can sit right there and watch me kill him. Then I'll let you go for the sheriff."

"Who?" he blurted. "Who is it?"

"My brother," I answered softly. "Will you be sorry to see him die, Flanagan? Or has he fooled you too with his sanctimony? What kind of man do you think he really is?"

"Don't do it, Sam! Listen, your brother's a fine fellow! What's the matter with you? Are you crazy? That's it! I don't mean exactly crazy, but just a bit upset by the boy's death. Look here now, Sam." His voice became cajoling. "You just go on home and I won't say a word to anybody about this. You're just worn out, that's all. The shock and all. Now, you put that gun away and go on home. We'll forget the whole thing."

He rose from his chair and started toward me.

"Sit down!"

I laughed at the way he scrambled back to the chair.

"You think I'm crazy, Flanagan? Maybe you're right. I'll tell you what you do. You don't want to see me kill Robert. All right. Just come over here and take the gun away from me." I watched the sick smile flicker across his face. "Come on. Take the gun away from me. Be a hero, Flanagan. Save your master's life. I won't shoot you. Just walk over and take the gun from my hand."

"Now, Sam. You better think this over."

"Afraid to do it? Maybe I am crazy, Flanagan. If I am, I might let you take the gun. Why don't you try?" I laughed again. If he approached and grabbed the gun, I probably would let him take it. "No, Flanagan? So. We'll sit here and wait. Did you ever see a man killed? Watch his face. You'll never forget it. You'll wake up at night yelling about it."

"You won't get away with it, Sam. They'll hang you for it! Don't you know that, man?"

"I hadn't thought about it. All right. They'll hang me."

"What for, Sam? What reason have you got? Your brother is one the finest men I've ever known."

"You don't know how wrong you are."

"You really going to kill him? This ain't a joke to scare me, is it?"

"No joke, Flanagan. Wait and see."

"It don't look to me like that gun would kill anybody unless you hit him just right. Only one shot, ain't it?"

"That's all I need. I won't miss. If you're thinking of warning him—maybe I'll shoot you instead. Don't try it."

We heard the creaking of wheels on the cobblestones. Someone fumbled at the latch of the main door. We heard it squeak open. Robert's voice echoed through the empty building.

"Foster! Where are you? Simpson! Simpson, show a light here!"

I held the barrel of the pistol unwaveringly toward Flanagan's chest. His face was blanched and twisted with great fear as he stared at the pistol.

Outside, Robert shouted again.

"Simpson, come here!"

My hand was steady, my face calm, as I watched both Flanagan and the door. But I could feel the cold drops of sweat leave my armpits and slide along my ribs. My heart pounded crazily.

I heard Robert's steps on the flooring of the factory. Flanagan opened and closed his mouth. He didn't take his eyes from the muzzle of the pistol.

It did not take Robert more than five seconds to cross the shop—not quite five seconds—yet in that brief time his life was saved. All the insane obsessions swept from my mind. Suddenly the pistol, so firmly held a moment before, was shaking in my hand. I put it down on the desk. I pressed both my hands down beside it. I stared at the door. In my mind a single word pounded like a tiny hammer, methodically and inexorably: "No! No! No!"

I realized it had been one gigantic nightmare since Davey's death. The tension left me and I felt sick. I knew that even in my most insane moment of the past days I could not have done it.

Flanagan had no way of knowing this. As soon as I put the pistol down, just as Robert opened the door, Flanagan shouted: "Look out! He'll kill you!" He dived for safety behind his chair.

My brother opened the door, stood there a moment, and then stepped into the room. We stared at each other. His gaze turned to see Flanagan peeping from the shelter of the chair.

"Are you playing a game, Frank?" he asked.

Flanagan burbled the words: "The gun—kill you!"

Robert's eyes came back to me and he saw the pistol. He smiled a little, wearily.

"Are you going to use it, Sam?"

"You know I'm not," I said in a harsh low voice, hearing the words fall between us as if someone else had spoken them.

He didn't move. When he spoke, his voice was very calm and quiet. "I won't give her up, Sam."

I gazed down at the desk for a moment. I whispered without looking at him: "Maybe she wants to go with me."

"She doesn't. I won't let her. Don't ask her, Sam."

"Maybe I won't have to ask."

"He's crazy!" Flanagan cried, finally coming out from the shelter of the chair. "Stark mad! Look at his eyes!"

"It's all right, Frank," Robert said. "Come on out. Look, I'll pick up the gun."

He started forward. I didn't touch the gun. Then he halted beside the desk and glanced quickly behind him into the darkness of the factory. I heard it then; someone else was coming across the loading platform toward the big door.

"Who's that?" Robert called. "Foster?"

He was out of the office and halfway across the factory floor when suddenly I remembered who it might be, who might have seen him on the street and followed him here. I yelled as I rose from the chair: "Get away from that door!"

It was too late then. I heard the door roll back and I heard Robert say: "What do you want?"

From the darkness beyond came a harsh cry of triumph and several quick gutturals in which I heard the name "Bellnap!" A shot crashed, there was an instant's flash of leaping light, and Robert cried out.

I grabbed the pistol and ran around the desk and through

the door. Starting across the factory floor, I instantly realized that I was framed in the light from the office. I jumped behind a pillar and waited for him to move. I needed no floodlamp shining out on that dark floor beyond the office—I knew exactly the look of those slitted eyes, the little whorls of brown beard crawling over the angular jawbones, the scrabbly moustache above the tight mouth, the forage cap perched low on the forehead, so that even without a light I would be able to see the crossed cavalry sabres above the visor. From the sound, I knew what kind of gun he had. It was a Colt's revolver of the type we had used in the cavalry since 1862.

There was a movement in the shadows near the door. I held my pistol ready.

"You in there!" he called hoarsely. "Come on out!"

I didn't answer, didn't make a sound. The odds gave me little hope; I had one shot and he had five. He had always been a good shot—he knew how to use that revolver. If only Flanagan kept his head and stayed in the office, sooner or later Joe Potter would go after him and frame himself in the light. I was quite sure he hadn't seen me dash through the door; he'd probably heard me while he was looking down at Robert's body.

Even as I waited for him to show himself, it sickened me to realize that Robert was dead. Through my fault it had happened. Had I not been so tangled in my own crazed thoughts, I could have warned him.

Then Flanagan whimpered in the office. That would do it, if only he would stay out of sight.

"It's me!" he cried. "Only Frank Flanagan. I'm coming out!"

There was nothing but silence near the door. I couldn't waste my only shot now. I had to reveal my presence.

"Stay there, Flanagan!" I shouted, and then crouched behind the pillar.

"Whoever's out there, don't shoot!" Flanagan called in frantic sobs. "I'm coming out now! Here I come! Don't shoot!"

"Stay where you are!" I yelled again.

I started for the door even as he appeared. For an instant, I thought he'd be all right. Joe Potter had nothing against him; had never seen him before. He might let him go.

I was wrong—the flame stabbed again and the sound of the shot ripped the silence. Flanagan sagged and slumped against the doorway, hanging there as his fingernails scratched wildly at the wood before he dropped to the floor. Just as he went down, there was another shot—it either missed him or went right through his body. The lamp smashed on the desk in the office. For a split second the light vanished. Then there was another kind of light as the shattered lamp spurted tiny jets of flaming oil across the desk and the floor. They seemed to creep idly, lazily poking and probing along the grain of the wood. I crouched by my pillar, as if in a dream, alternately watching those scores of tiny fires and the darkness of the wall against which Joe Potter waited. Then the flames began to feed on the old flooring, viciously lapping up the residue of the oil with which those boards had been cleaned once a week for decades.

Get out of here, I told myself. Yet I couldn't move.

There was no sound from him. I waited. The flames were higher now, doubling in size almost every second. Still he gave no sign.

Then I heard his feet shuffling once, and again. I saw the shadows shift in density. He was coming after me, risking the light of the fire. If I waited for him, I too would be outlined by the flames.

I stayed there a few seconds longer, until I could see plainly the pillar before me. I moved left, away from the main door, starting to run along the dark wall. He saw me,

shouted once in fury, then was silent. I knew what he was doing—standing there waiting for me to circle around and try to get out through the open main door. If only I could keep completely silent, I knew I could reach the back door by which I had entered. Then I could circle the building and wait for him on the loading platform. He'd have to come out when the building was all ablaze. I might not have to shoot him then.

Yard by yard I moved along the wall. I thanked him for the fire. It gave me light to see him now, vaguely silhouetted there near the office doorway. Its liquid whispering was loud enough to cover any small sounds I made.

I had to move swiftly now—soon he would stop watching the main door; he would have to get away from the heat of the fire. Then he would come out on the floor of the factory searching for me. I knew he would find me unless I hurried. I wondered if he knew whom he was hunting. Now he had three shots and I had one. I was again tempted to use mine. I wouldn't miss. His figure was clear now in the reflected glare of the fire.

I was at the angle of the building. There were machines between me and him. I moved more quickly, less carefully. The door was halfway down this wall. I could hear him walking.

"Sam Bellnap! I'll get you! Come out!" It was a mad shout, rising hoarsely above the crackle of the flames.

I stiffened against the wall, my pistol ready. He was walking toward me now, half-turned to watch the main door, threading his way clumsily through the piles of shoes and the tall frames of the machinery. The fire was whistling, roaring, and already it had started to lick out onto the factory floor. The walls of the office were solid flame. Little gouts of fire leaped from them and sailed out in quest of more fuel. There were sounds like those of a distant Gatling gun as the walls of the office began to crumble.

He was too close now. I decided to run for the back door. I turned and took one step. Something grabbed me around the throat. Even as I uttered a strangled cry, I heard bells ringing. When I wrenched myself free and crouched in the darkness behind a machine, I knew what it was. A harness hanging there—I had run into it and set its bells jangling.

I heard him shout again. Then he fired. The bullet slammed into the machine and zinged viciously off in the darkness. Two shots left for him! Let him waste them, I prayed.

I heard something else, someone calling me. Robert!

"Sam! Where are you?" His voice was very faint above the roaring flames.

"I'm coming!" I yelled. "Hold on!"

Even as I knew I would have to kill Joe Potter now to get Robert to safety, I wanted to shout with joy that my brother was alive.

"I got you now!" Joe yelled and came running toward me.

I couldn't fire yet; I might miss and that would end it. I dropped to the floor and twisted my body to face him. Now he was ten yards away. He couldn't miss me. My pea shooter against the revolver.

He stopped, partly hidden from me by the machinery. Without conscious thought, I knew that the glare of the fire had disturbed his vision. He probably couldn't see me lying there. The light from the flames now began to cascade upon me. I couldn't stay there—and if I moved I'd be killed.

Quickly he moved away from the shelter of the tall machine. I had him now. I knew that, even as I saw him staring, trying to locate me. But I had learned my lesson too well in the war; I couldn't pull the trigger and kill him without giving him a chance.

"Here, Joe," I whispered.

He swiveled and fired. The bullet slammed into the floor at my face. Splinters tore my cheek. I could feel them sticking in my flesh.

Then I aimed and fired. He slumped forward and fell. I dropped my pistol and started for the main door. I didn't have to look at him. The hole would be in the center of his forehead.

All around me now the flames were soaring to the ceiling. I had to get to Robert. Sparks were showering on me; my clothes were smouldering and tiny points of pain stabbed my flesh. I could see my brother's body lying a few feet from the door.

Behind me the building was crumbling. I could hear the swift roar of the flames as the office collapsed and the fire rushed over me instantly and then receded for a moment. The heat was broiling my flesh. I could feel my hair shrivel. Then a beam fell behind me and I sprawled forward. I didn't feel any pain; it had hit me, but I didn't think I was pinned there. I was almost afraid to crawl, but I tried, and moved forward a few feet. I was near Robert and the door now, but the flames formed a brilliant dancing ring through which I must pass. I crawled along, trying not to breathe the flames into my lungs. I held my mouth close to the floor.

I reached Robert. He was unconscious, but his heart was beating. I shrugged out of my jacket and wrapped it around his head. Then I gripped him under the shoulders and dragged him toward the door. I started to back through it and then the fire sucked out all the strength I had left. I could go no farther. I knew we were both going to die.

Then it was cooler suddenly. The brilliance was gone. I was on the ground. I could hear a voice say: "This one's in bad shape. His clothes are still burning." Someone began

to roll me across the wet cobblestones. Then I felt nothing more.

I could hear it, closer, ever closer—that high thin piercing yell of theirs above the sound of the guns, and I could see them now, coming out of the woods—I could see the rabbits running ahead of them in the short pasture grass. I saw the flocks of birds scattering from the trees—our guns began to find the range, blasting those long lines of racing brownish-gray shadows, blowing little clumps of them into fire and smoke and dust—still they came with that triumphant scream, louder now. They were only a few yards away, my Spencer was empty, and I knew I had to get to my horse. I tried to run and could not—everyone else was fleeing those thousands of bearded spectres who had appeared in the quiet dawn—something was holding me down and I was screaming again. All I could remember was the name of the town. Gettysburg. A hell of a place to get killed.

There was no yelling, only the roaring whistle of the flames; there was no artillery, only the booming of the falling timbers; there were no rebels racing across that green field, only a mob of people surging in the street and watching the great fire. It was Highland Landing, not Gettysburg. Nothing was holding me down; someone was bent over me trying to pick the splinters from my face. His features wavered and withdrew and I blinked my eyes several times until he came into focus. It was Judge Crist.

"Robert?" I whispered.

"You brought him out, Sam. He's in bad shape. Lie still while I fix your face."

I shoved him aside and sat up. I put my knees under me and lurched to my feet. Judge Crist held my arm.

"Over there," he said, pointing to a little group outlined in the glare of the fire. I walked toward them with his support.

Doc Byrnes was working on Robert; Martha was trying

to help him, sobbing and kissing Robert's face and trying to undo the buttons of his shirt.

"Get out of here, all of you!" Doc yelled.

Her father took one of Martha's arms and I took the other, and we led her away from Robert and away from the crowd. She turned her anguished face to me.

"You killed him!" she cried. "Oh, Sam, you killed him!"

"He's not dead yet, dear," the judge interposed. "Doc says he has a good chance."

"I didn't shoot him," I said.

"You did! You killed him!" she cried. "Your brother! He loved you so, Sam. You and Davey both."

"I didn't shoot him," I repeated.

"If he dies, Sam," the judge said, "it will go bad for you."

I stared at him. "Does everybody think I did it?"

"Self-defense, Sam. You're a lawyer."

I walked away from him without another word. I went over to stand beside Doctor Byrnes. Several volunteer firemen were keeping the crowd away from Robert. It seemed as if everyone in Highland Landing had turned out for the fire. Bucket brigades were trying to keep the fire from spreading to neighboring warehouses. Our three buildings were now just flaming shells. Far down Front Street I could hear the clanging of another bell.

"How is he, Doc?" I asked.

"I think he'll make it, Sam. You're not as good a shot as you used to be. Too high in the shoulder."

"You, too!"

"Didn't you do it? They told me you did."

"What kind of bullet made that wound, Doc?"

"Pretty big. Maybe a .44, fired close up."

"I had a .32."

"All right," he said laconically, his fingers busy with bandages. "So you didn't do it. I only half-believed them

anyway. Come on, give me a hand getting him into this ambulance before they pack you off to jail."

I helped him get Robert on a stretcher the ambulance driver provided. Doc kept up a running commentary on poor marksmanship while we put my brother in the ambulance. I thanked him silently for the feeling of confidence which he passed to me. Martha followed the stretcher into the ambulance. Just as Doc climbed in and the driver was picking up the reins, Doc turned for an instant and nodded to me. "The sheriff's over by the fire, Sam. Told me to tell you. I'll send word down from the hospital if Robert wakes up. Then they'll let you out of jail. Who was the other fellow with the .44?"

He was gone before I could answer. I walked toward the cordon the firemen had formed in the street. I saw Sheriff Boudrye talking to a man in a white helmet—Alvin Harper, the fire chief.

"Hello, Sam," Boudrye said. "You ready to go?"

"Where?" I asked dully.

"Up the courthouse. We can keep you there tonight."

"Did you get the others out of there?"

"Others! What others? You mean there was somebody in there that didn't come out?"

I nodded. "It's too late, now. Flanagan the drayman, and Joe Potter, my cousin."

"Jesus! You kill them, too?"

Harper, hearing that there were bodies in the burning buildings, ran to his firemen and issued instructions to watch for them.

"Listen, Sheriff, I didn't do it," I said wearily. "When Robert is able to talk, he'll tell you all about it."

"I don't want to discourage you, Sam, but he's in a pretty bad way. His wife said you did it. Let's go along."

"All right," I said. "First, is my uncle around here? Jeff Potter?"

"Right over there," Boudrye pointed.

"Mind if I speak to him, Sheriff?"

"Go ahead, Sam. Take your time. I'll watch the fire."

My uncle saw me coming. He walked a few paces toward me and then stood waiting. He spoke first.

"Is he in there, Sam?"

"Yes, Uncle Jeff."

"My God! Poor Joe!"

"He didn't die in the fire, Uncle Jeff." The next words were long in coming. "I killed him."

"Ah, Sam! You killed my boy, when you knew— You were the only one who knew, and you killed him!" It wasn't an accusation. Rather, his words were one long sigh of despair.

"Will it help any to say I waited, Uncle Jeff? I waited until it meant Robert and me, or Joe. That's when I fired."

"Both my boys dead now. Both of 'em dead, Sam. What am I going to do now?" He was weeping silently.

I put my arms around him for a few moments.

"I want to stay with you, Uncle Jeff, and tell you how it happened, but they're taking me off to jail. They think I shot Robert."

"I'll tell 'em, Sam. They can't lock you up. Joe did it, didn't he?"

"Yes, he did it. But I won't need you. They'll let me out as soon as Robert is able to talk. You go home to Margaret and young George. I'm sorry, Uncle Jeff."

"I don't blame you, Sam. I don't blame you. I'll speak for you if you need me."

I rejoined the sheriff. We walked over to his buggy and Judge Crist came toward us with my jacket, in which I had wrapped Robert when I pulled him out of the fire.

"Anything I can do, Sam, you just ask for me," the judge said.

"Thanks. It's all right."

"I'll be up at the hospital, Sheriff, if you want me."

"Fine, Judge. Come along, Sam."

We rode silently along Front Street through the crowds hurrying down from the town above to get a look at the fire. Suddenly I remembered something.

"If you think I shot my brother, why didn't you grab me right away, Sheriff? You were just standing there. I had to walk up and surrender."

"I knew you weren't going anywhere, Sam. I know you pretty well. Besides, I was watching that fire. Long time since we had one as good as that." He paused, hesitated, and then continued casually. "You have prospects of entering a new field for the Bellnaps. Hanging, I mean."

"You're wrong," I said. "We had a pirate in the family. They hanged him a hundred years ago."

"Well, if that don't beat the Dutch! You won't be the first one then."

29.

It was two days later when Robert regained consciousness enough to speak. Later that afternoon, Sheriff Boudrye came to my cell in the county jail and unlocked the gate.

"Sorry to see you go, Sam. We don't often get a good chess player in here. Your father was pretty good."

"Did you have him in this place?"

"Just when he came to see his clients. We had many a good game. Always licked me."

The sheriff was quite profuse in his apologies as he bade me goodbye. He even offered me a ride home.

"No, thanks," I replied. "Goodbye, Sheriff."

"Sure, Sam. See you again."

"Not in here you won't."

We smiled at each other, and I walked down the street. First I went to the livery stable. My uncle wasn't there; young George was in charge.

"Hello, Mr. Bellnap."

"Hello, George."

"Glad to see you again. I been wanting to tell you something."

"What is it?"

"I'm the one you should have told about my father." He smiled bravely. "I could have told Grandpa easy like, so it wouldn't have bothered him so much. He's all busted up about it now."

"Probably I should have told you."

"Grandpa's going to take me to see my father's grave after the war."

"He was a brave man. You're proud of him, aren't you?"

"Sure I am," he said. "Grandpa told me how he led the rebels down the wrong trail to let the other men escape while he was captured." He sniffed and turned away to wipe his nose. "Something I can do for you, Mr. Bellnap?"

"Yes. First thing, call me Sam. Second, that chestnut colt, the one we named Fighting Joe."

"You want to take him out, Sam?"

"No. Can you take good care of him?"

"Of course. He's my favorite."

"All right. He's yours."

"Mine! You mean he belongs to me?"

"All yours, George."

"Judas Priest! Wait till I tell Grandpa! Thanks, Sam! Thanks! I'll take the best care of him ever."

"Good! Now I wish you'd get me a horse and buggy. That bay I had the other day."

"Right away, Sam. He'll be ready before you can say Jack Robinson."

When I was seated in the buggy, I thought of something else.

"You like to go fishing, George?"

"Sure. More than almost anything."

"Fine. Then first chance you get, you ride out to our house on the colt and ask for Mrs. Bellnap, my brother's wife. She'll let you have your pick of my tackle. Take a complete outfit—everything you want."

"Judas! Thanks! Golly, Sam, what are you doing all this for?"

"A boy ought to have a horse and do some fishing." I smiled and drove off with a wave of my hand.

When I arrived home, Martha was at the hospital. Mrs. Malloy greeted me effusively. After I had escaped her embrace, she spent five minutes discussing the evil character and shadowy ancestry of Sheriff Boudrye. The most chari-

table thing she said about him was that his parents had never been inside a church. Finally I managed to get up to my own room.

There wasn't very much for me to pack. I put a few shirts, socks, some underclothing, and my razors in the black leather bag which had been mother's gift to me when I started at Columbia College. That was all I really needed, but after a moment's thought, I added my cavalry boots, two hunting shirts, some heavy socks, and a dark gray corduroy jacket with trousers to match, which I had often worn on early spring fishing trips. The bag was almost filled now. I sat on the edge of the bed, looking at it.

That should be everything, I thought. Whatever else is necessary I can buy when I get there, wherever it is.

I remembered my diploma and went to the desk to get it. Then I walked downstairs to the library. I could hear the Cassidy girl and Mrs. Malloy talking in the kitchen, their voices muted by the heavy door in the hallway.

I stood there in the library looking at the books. There was yet a little room in the bag. I walked up and down along the shelves. I posed myself that ancient question: If you were Robinson Crusoe, what books would you like to have with you on that lonely island? I read title after title and discarded them all. None of them appealed to me. I retraced my steps and reached for two volumes on one of the shelves near the fireplace. They were identically bound in gray leather with gold stamping on the spines. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. Far better than another shirt or two, I thought.

As I started to leave the room, I glanced up at the portraits beside the fireplace, old Jacob Bellnap and his grandson Elihu. Now for the first time I discerned a quality in their frozen features which was new to me—always heretofore I had been proud of them and they had seemed to be proud of me, of all of us; they had always been there

as a reminder of the heritage which they had left us; the love of this land, this valley, these highlands which they and their sons had settled and cherished and passed on to us.

Now I saw scorn in those hawk eyes. I seemed to hear their bitter voices coming out of the olden times—the voices which, when they were part of living flesh, had never thought it necessary to discuss the possibility of leaving Highland Landing. It was their town. No Bellnap left it. I could almost distinguish the harsh gutturals of Jacob and the sharp biting Oxonian of his grandson. My mind formed the word "coward."

I found myself answering them in a whisper, protesting to those stony faces that I was not running away—I was leaving a place which would forever mean only sorrow and sad memories, and heartbreak as well. Everything which had meant happiness in other years was gone now and there was no reason to stay.

It might still be their town, I told them, but no longer was it mine. I wasn't running away, though. They couldn't say that.

But they did. The pictures told me again and again.

All right, I thought. So I am. And why not? Did either of you ever sleep with his brother's wife? Do you want me to stay here and maybe have it happen again? There's not much chance of it now, I'll grant you. He almost died and then she discovered she really loved him, not me. I suppose that's what happened. But even if it's only a small chance, I won't risk it. That's why I'm going. Call it running away if you want to.

And there's this, I told them. Can't you see, can't you understand what it means to me to have killed a man—one more man dead now under my hand after four rotten years of killing? My own cousin. I killed him.

What's happened to me? That's the question. My right to leave Highland Landing has nothing to do with it. I'm

going to find a new place and begin once more at the beginning. Can I in God's name do anything else? I'll try to find what I came out of Andersonville to find. If I do, maybe I'll come back. Is that fair enough?

I suppose if I had stood there, I might have imagined that they nodded their heads. Instead I turned and left the library.

Up in the room again, I put the two volumes of Shakespeare in the bag. Then I walked to my desk to see if there might be something I had forgotten. I didn't notice anything I might not send for later if I needed it. The felt-lined mahogany case with the second target pistol was still atop my desk. I opened the case and picked up the gun. Weighing it, I glanced at my bag, still open on the bed. Then I replaced the pistol in the case. It would be a long time before I would have need of a gun for any purpose. Maybe never.

There was a knock at the door, and then I heard Martha's voice: "May I come in, Sam?"

Deliberately I waited until I had stilled the longing in me, the desire to go to the door and take her in my arms. Glancing at the bag on the bed, I made my voice calm and quiet: "Sure. Come on in."

She opened the door and I sensed that she was standing in the doorway watching me. I kept my attention on the tiny hasp which secured the pistol case. I was sure that no action or word of mine would serve to rekindle the blaze of passion between us; I hoped that her will was even stronger than mine.

"How is Robert?" I asked without looking up.

"He's going to be all right, Sam. If there's no relapse, they say he can come home in two weeks or less."

"Good. He tell you what happened?"

Her voice was tremulous and yet quite clear. "He told us all about it, Sam. I'm terribly sorry I accused you."

I looked at her and then shook my head. "You had reason to. I was going to kill him."

"You wouldn't have hurt him. I know you too well. He shielded you when he told us; he said there had been no quarrel between you. He told the sheriff you were carrying the pistol as protection against Joe Potter. Poor Uncle Jeff! With all his troubles, he visited the hospital several times yesterday and today to see how Robert was. He feels so badly about it."

She came into the room and glanced briefly at the bag on the bed.

"Sam, you don't have to go away now. We'll need you here. Robert wants you to stay. He told me to tell you."

"Did you tell him about us? About what happened?"

"No, Sam. I'll never speak of it again. I'll try not to think about it. Somehow, though, I think he knows, and still he wants you to stay."

I walked over to her and took her hands in mine. "Look at me, Martha." The clear gray eyes turned upward to mine.

"What do you want me to do?" I asked her.

"I want you to stay in Highland Landing, Sam. This is where you belong. Don't leave because of me."

"Then you think it wouldn't happen again?"

"I know it wouldn't!" The words were swift and emphatic, and yet I sensed a trace of fear in them.

"It would happen again and again! Do you think I could stay in this town and leave you alone? I don't ever want another woman in my life! It will always be you." I pulled her to me and pressed all of her warm full body against mine. She struggled fiercely, yet I held her. I could feel my heart thumping against the pressure of her body.

"Let me go! Sam, let me go!"

My lips were pressing against hers. Suddenly her fighting ceased.

"Don't, Sam! Don't!" Her lips whispered under mine.

I kissed her for what seemed to be a long time. She didn't try to pull away. Her arms were around me and I could feel them holding me tightly. Her body was arched against me. In my last moment of restraint, I released her. She stood close to me with her head averted.

"Do you see now how it would be?" I said softly, gently. "I could never see you without wanting you. When you came into this room, you were sure that you loved your husband. I was sure of it. And yet you kissed me. The other night you turned to him when he needed you, but what will you do when he's well and strong again? You love him now, Martha. Don't take the chance of destroying that by asking me to stay. I don't want you to ask me. God knows, if you do, then I will. I can't help myself!"

She walked a few steps away from me then, turned, and went to my bed. She emptied the bag on the counterpane and began repacking.

"Then all the talking's done? You're going?" It was more a statement than a question.

"It's not only you and I, Martha. Maybe I could solve that here in Highland Landing. I don't know. I guess I have to find something I lost in the war, in prison. I wonder if you have any idea what that place was. Is it clear what it did to me? I don't understand it myself."

"I know what it was, Sam." She turned away from the bag; everything was in it. There was quite a bit more empty space than before. She went to the chest of drawers across the room and took out two more shirts and an armful of socks. "And I know what it did to you," she continued. Her voice was gentle. "Anyone could have known it by looking at you the night you came home. The sick, frightened look in your eyes that you tried to hide. I knew it wasn't only because I was married to Robert. It's possible that the Sam I used to know might even have taken that

with a smile, and meant it. But you were sick in Andersonville and those other places, Sam, in your body and in your mind. You'll recover. You became tired there and weak, but you'll get your strength back. That's why Davey's death tore you to pieces. That's why you went after Robert with the gun. He understands that."

"No one else in this town will ever understand it," I said bitterly. "There are probably a thousand stories racing around about how I tried to kill my brother."

"Maybe not, Sam. Remember, Robert didn't tell them anything about it. Anyone who says it would be only guessing. You did save his life. It's likely people will remember that more than the rest of it."

"I killed a man," I said. "No matter where it is I go, I'll remember that. Flanagan's dead too, because I wouldn't let him leave the factory. Davey. If I hadn't interfered, maybe he would be alive now. I can't ever forget that. I blamed Robert for it! How great a fool can a man be?"

I turned to gaze out the window. The Hudson was already shadowed by dusk, but the sun still lighted the purple hills across the river. I could see the bare branches of the great Balm of Gilead tree down on Hessian Bluff above the water.

"You'll be all right, Sam. You'll come home again."

"I wonder if I ever will."

"I'm sure of it."

She smoothed the contents of the bag and closed it. She didn't have to struggle with the straps; they buckled easily.

"Come downstairs, Sam. We're having an early dinner. Father is in the library. I asked him out to keep me company. I didn't know you'd be out of jail so soon!" She smiled and took my hand. "Come on, Sam."

I reached to the bed and picked up the bag. "All right. I won't have to come back upstairs for this."

She stared at me in surprise.

"You're not leaving tonight!"

I nodded. "On the eight o'clock train."

"Wait until tomorrow."

"I've been here too long already." I turned at the doorway and looked at the room once more.

"All right," I said. "Let's go down."

30.

It was an excellent meal—a pot roast of venison which Martha said Weinhaber had rooted from the recesses of his icebox. Mrs. Malloy served the soup amid a steady flow of tears, and then she sat at the table with Martha and Judge Crist and Jim and myself. The Cassidy girl hovered in the background, grumbling every now and then that it was getting late and she had to get home early tonight to write a letter to Sergeant Meehan who was now on detached service in Washington. Once as she served something over my shoulder, she whispered that she and the sergeant were going to be married as soon as he came home. I offered my congratulations, and she beamed.

"How much pay does a sergeant make, Mr. Bellnap?"

Mrs. Malloy emerged from her tears and her food long enough to order the girl into the kitchen. Then she turned her attention to me.

"You stay here in your home, Samuel!" The words were broken by her sobbing. "Your family built this town. You belong here. You got no right to be running off into the wilderness, the dear Lord only knows where! You stay here and get married and raise a family!"

The Judge cleared his throat and spoke pompously.

"I think that perhaps Sam is right to go into a new country. Vast opportunities are waiting. If I were twenty years younger, I'd take a try at it myself."

"I have to disagree," Jim said. "My wife talks too much, but this time she's on the bullseye. This is where you be-

long, Sam. Folks around here like you the way they liked your father."

"Stubborn young fool, just like Isaac Bellnap before him," Mrs. Malloy cried. "I want to see some more Bellnap children before I pass on. You stay here and produce them, Sam. There's many a nice girl in this town would give her eyeteeth to get you."

Later, her weeping subsided. With the coffee she was telling me bluntly that I was a young fool to go, but that I'd be back—no question of that! Anyone who ever left Highland Landing always came back. Where else on the face of the earth was there a place so fine? So what was the sense of my traveling half around the world just to find that out?

The Judge disagreed sententiously with everything she said. He knew why I was going.

Finally it was time. Mrs. Malloy gave Jim my bag and he took it out to the buggy. He had already brought the buggy to the drive in front of the house.

"Will you need any money, Sam?" Martha asked.

"I have my army pay. That will last a while."

Mrs. Malloy kissed me a tearful farewell and then fled to the kitchen. Jim returned to the house, shook my hand firmly without speaking, and followed his wife.

"Goodbye, my boy," the Judge said, pumping my arm. "Let us hear from you soon."

"Goodbye."

Martha walked to the porch with me and swung the front door partly shut.

"Will they let me in to see Robert?" I asked.

"Sure they will, Sam."

"Well, Martha. Goodbye."

"Kiss me," she said.

I kissed her once, gently. When she spoke, her voice was soft, the wood smoke was in the gray eyes again, the ridges

of her cheekbones were flushed. "Goodbye, Sam. Come back to us."

Then I was off the porch. I didn't look back until I was in the buggy and had picked up the reins. Her father was standing with her now. I waved once and then drove away under the bare elm trees.

The hospital was on Second Street, a few blocks above the livery stable. An officious young attendant didn't mean to let me visit my brother, so for the last time in Highland Landing, with a sense of valediction, I used the Bellnap name. It worked as well as it always had. I grinned as I followed him through the whitewashed corridor. Out where I was going, "Bellnap" wouldn't mean a thing.

Robert was a prize patient. He had a room all to himself, although it was scarcely big enough for the bed and chest of drawers and the medicine table beside him. A small stove made the room very warm.

"Don't let him talk too much," the attendant warned. "And you can stay only ten minutes, Mr. Bellnap."

My brother was awake when I entered. He raised his hand gently in salutation and then dropped it limply. A small smile twitched his mouth.

" 'Lo, Sam," he murmured.

"How do you feel, Robert?"

"Terrible."

"They had me in jail. Did you know?"

He nodded almost imperceptibly and smiled again. "Thanks for pulling me out. Told me the plant burned."

"Don't talk so much," I warned him. "I'll talk to you. Just nod your head yes or no."

"Nodding hurts. I'll talk."

"I'm leaving, Robert. Tonight."

"No!" A look of pain came and went in his eyes. He waved his hand feebly at me. "Stay home, Sam!"

"No. I have to go. Maybe I'll come back. There are a

few things I thought I'd ask you, Robert. I suppose you'll keep my stuff for me?"

He whispered assent.

"All right, then. Will you give the livery stable to Uncle Jeff from my share of the estate?"

"No." He paused to swallow painfully. "Both of us give it. Poor Joe."

"One more thing, Robert. Will you see that young George Potter stays in school and goes on to college if he wants to?"

"Yes."

"Use my money for that."

"Both of us."

"All right, Robert. I guess I'd better be leaving. They allowed me only ten minutes to see you. Well, goodbye. Get well soon. I'll write to you."

He lifted his hand a few inches from the counterpane. I clasped it in both of mine and held it that way for a few moments. There were tears in his eyes, and then I couldn't see them any longer, because my own were misty.

" 'Bye, Sam. Come back."

"Goodbye, Robert. Take care of her."

I backed away from the bed and he smiled and whispered another farewell. Then he closed his eyes. I turned away and walked down the hall.

I drove down Second Street to the livery stable and tied the bay to the hitching rail. Inside, my uncle was sitting at his desk, staring at the wall. He didn't even hear me come in. I had to speak before he turned around.

"Will you drive me down to the station, Uncle Jeff? I have to catch the eight o'clock."

"Where you going, Sam?"

"Chicago, and then West. I don't really know."

"Because of Joe?"

"That's partly why, Uncle Jeff. That and other reasons."

I expected him to speak as the others had, but he didn't.

"I wish I could go away, Sam, but I'm too old. I have to stay here. It's a wise thing you're doing. A new country will help you forget it all." He sighed deeply. "Let's go, boy, or you'll miss the train."

The eight o'clock was late, as Highland Landing trains have always been. I stood there on the platform waiting with my uncle. We didn't speak; we watched the lights of the ferry flickering and shifting far out on the river. The tide was moving down the Hudson, and near the shore, a line of barges floated swiftly with it. The muffled chugging of the steam tug which guided them echoed in the silence.

Soon we heard the warning whistle from the highlands to the south, repeated again and again, reverberating from the ridge above. Then the headlamp of the locomotive pierced the blackness of the waterfront.

Jeff gripped my hand and held it.

"Sam, I told you after it happened—I want to tell you again. Don't blame yourself. It couldn't have been any other way. It was the war and the prison did it to him."

"I'll try to think of it that way, Uncle Jeff. I waited until I knew I had to save Robert. I wish it had all been different; I wish I'd never come home. If I had died there in the South—"

"Thank God you didn't," he interrupted. "Too many have died in the war. You go wherever it is you can forget about it, and then come back home when you do. Come back to your friends, Sam."

"I don't know, Uncle Jeff. It will be a long time."

"I'll look for you, Sam. We all will. Goodbye, boy, and God bless you."

The hissing steam from the engine cut off any further words, and I shook his hand and picked up my bag. He gripped my arm once more in farewell. Then I climbed

aboard the train. I turned and saw him trudging through the big gate toward the buggy waiting in the street. The train jerked indecisively a couple of times and then pulled steadily out of the station. I found a seat on the land side of the coach I had entered, and I sat beside the window looking up at the blinking yellow lights of Highland Landing gliding by.

I saw the steeple of St. George's, and then, gauging the distance as well as I could, I stared at the dark outline of the ridge above the river. It was too dark and too far, but I imagined I could see that orderly plot of graves in the Old Town Cemetery; I pictured the tasselled chain of the little fence swinging in the raw March wind; clear in my mind was the new mound of fresh sod beside the others. I wondered if I ever would come home to lie there beside Davey.

Then I knew that the train had passed the cemetery and was running below Grand Avenue. Again I looked up at the crest of the ridge. There were the lights of a few houses, a carriage lamp or two flickering along through the trees which lined the street. I could see a light high above the others, just where I imagined our house to be. I guessed what it was. Martha was up there in the cupola atop our house, watching the train. Perhaps she had one of father's telescopes with her. I lifted my hand beside the window and moved it gently several times in farewell. I hoped she could see me.

Then the train rattled around a curve and the ridge above was dark. The whistle shrilled several times for the crossing at Peterkin Flats. Highland Landing was gone.